NEW STATESMAN
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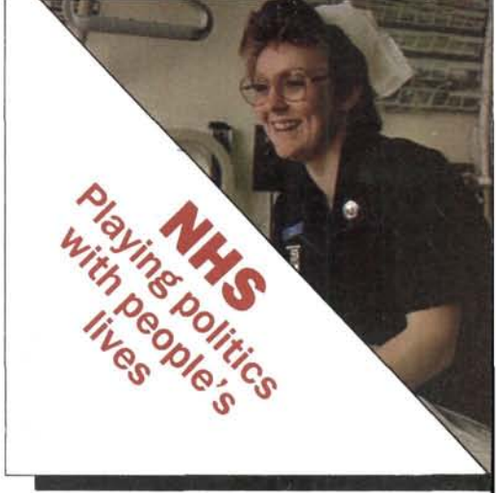
NEW STATESMAN

- Ben Pimlott on unemployment blight
- Edward Pearce
- Can Labour win?
- Tube workers speak out
- Surrealism and revolution
- Williamson on Biko



NHS
Playing politics with people's lives

AFTER THE SUMMIT

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TRIDENT:
Mrs Thatcher's Ace

Illustration: John Minnion

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SUMATRA 1905

AS THE SUN SET OVER THE EMPIRE THEY HAD TO CUT DOWN ON FOOD.

BREWED IN GERMANY. DRUNK ALL OVER THE WORLD

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NEW STATESMAN

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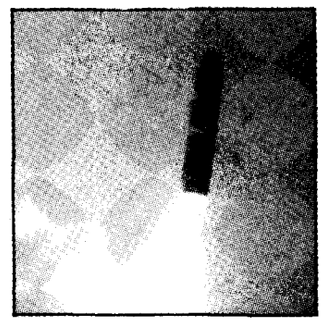

WHY IS THE British government so fearful of multilateral nuclear disarmament? Britain has been at the forefront of recent moves within NATO to introduce new nuclear capabilities to compensate for the loss of intermediate-range cruise and Pershing missiles — moves which could, as Paul Rogers reveals on page 10, transform Trident into an aggressive first-strike nuclear weapon aimed by NATO high command at targets in the Soviet Union.

Mrs Thatcher and her ministers repeatedly argued that cruise missiles were introduced into Britain as a counter to the deployment of SS20 missiles by the Soviet Union. But now that all these missiles are to be removed, our top brass has joined the NATO military chorus demanding various sorts of extra nuclear weaponry or (the new buzz word) their 'modernisation'; and at a recent meeting of NATO defence ministers in Monterey, California, defence minister George Younger made quite the most hawkish plea for 'compensation'.

Mrs Thatcher has put herself forthrightly on the record as not being prepared to accept the 'de-nuclearisation' of Europe and refusing to give up Britain's dubiously independent nuclear deterrent. She has been obliged to go along with President Reagan's enthusiasm for the INF deal and a possible agreement on intercontinental ballistic missiles. But she has reaffirmed her opposition to further negotiations to remove short-range and battlefield nuclear weaponry from Europe until the Soviet Union makes reductions in conventional forces and scraps its chemical weapons. Indeed, Britain is actually to increase the power and range of its nuclear artillery and Lance missiles stationed in West Germany. And Trident, of course, is going full steam ahead.

Mrs Thatcher's government is not acting alone. Britain and France are in the vanguard of moves within western Europe to strengthen the nuclear power of NATO, and to recognise and enhance the role of the British and French nuclear forces. There is resistance from Norway, Spain and Greece, and more particularly from the West Germans who naturally welcome the idea of negotiating away the danger of short-range nuclear weaponry being used on their soil. But the pressures to re-arm rather than disarm, for institutionalised confrontation rather than detente, are in the ascendant. In October, the West European Union — a grouping of Britain, France, Italy, West Germany and the Benelux countries — insisted that only nuclear weapons are sufficiently frightening to deter a potential aggressor.

These moves are entirely against the spirit of the summit in Washington. The summit is significant not for the actual quantity of nuclear firepower removed — just 3 per cent of the world's nuclear armoury — but for the fact that for the first time negotiations will reduce that armoury, and not just slow down its growth. It presages still further negotiations which could, in time, reduce both nuclear and conventional arms and forces worldwide and introduce a new mood of trust and co-operation between east and west Europe as well as between the superpowers.

This makes the attempts to 'compensate' for the loss of the very weapons which are publicly being removed politically vulnerable. Their removal is symbolic. Public opinion throughout western Europe could well be outraged by such blatant cold-war thinking. Moreover, the attitudes of Mrs Thatcher and her cronies are vulnerable to the fast-moving strategy of Mikhail Gorbachev. There are already indications that he is prepared to make unilateral reductions in the Soviet forces in eastern Europe — and that could remove at a stroke one of the principal covers for Thatcher's unyielding attachment to nuclear weapons.

But the most demoralising blow could come from Washington. The *New York Times* has just reported that a highly classified secret Pentagon document — a net assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the opposing NATO and Warsaw Pact forces prepared by the Joint Chiefs of Staffs — has authoritatively concluded that an attack by the Warsaw Pact on western Europe would be 'highly risky and logically improbable'.

The Pentagon recognises that the Warsaw Pact has a crude superiority in forces and weaponry, but its overall judgment confirms that of earlier net assessment exercises — that once the quality of those forces and weaponry, and other factors like morale, training, economic resources, etc, are taken into account, NATO is strong enough to deter a Soviet attack.

The task for the Labour Party and peace movement is blazingly clear. They must make sure that the British people are aware of the momentous choices which are being made in Europe and the world — between disarmament and rearmament, between creating detente or entrenching hostility. To descend now into a premature debate on Labour's unilateralist or multilateralist posture at the next election, as some would have us do in the cause of an inhibited electoralism masquerading as realism, would be folly. That debate must come, but there are more important scores to settle first. Labour fought the last election on an outdated defence policy. It would be sensible not to do so again. □

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DIARY

Belfast

The tube to Heathrow is packed with shoppers. I find a seat as we head west from Knightsbridge. Opposite me a prematurely balding man in a pin-striped suit is reading the *Telegraph* and picking his nose. An Irish voice drifts through the crowded, silent carriage. At Boston Manor a young man strums a guitar. 'I'm going to sing a song called 'El Salvador' he says politely. *'She knows her lover is out in the sun. He's been fighting for a year. Outside soldiers are marching as the General wakes up and sips his coffee. Bodies are found in the street. El Salvador.'* At Osterley he walks through the carriage offering his hat. 'Merci pour la musique. I do not take any Social Security. This is my only income. Thank you very much.' The man opposite me, who has been impassive throughout, gives the busker a coin. My carriage is charmed by the gentle appeal of the singer; or perhaps impressed by his business enterprise. At Aldergrove, as the taxi slows over the ramps, an RUC man walks over with a rifle casually swinging from his shoulder. He waves us on. El Salvador. Ireland.

○

After Enniskillen there is heated discussion in the Catholic ghettos. The bishops have asked Catholics 'to support the Security Forces'. Many walked out of Sunday Mass in protest; others refused to attend. Writing in the *Andersonstown News*, worker priest Father Desmond Wilson analyses the betrayal. He notes how the Church hierarchy is 'criminalising' its own community. Those who voted for Sinn Fein are marked out as culpable. This strain of guilt paves the way for punishment: perhaps more troops; or the reintroduction of internment? After Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah*, Wilson sees parallels between the Nazi criminalisation of the Jews and what is happening in West Belfast. I meet a retired Catholic trade unionist who has also been affected by *Shoah*. During the war he didn't care who won; it was England's war not his. After *Shoah* he entered the confessional box and angrily questioned the priest about the Church's collusion with the Nazis. The priest was stunned into silence. Today the trade unionist still goes to Mass, but his rage against the bishops is furious. In this atmosphere I feel a certain kinship. My great grandparents fled Tsarist pogroms and found refuge in Ireland. It seems right to me that connections should be made.

○

Although Jesus hangs from so many wooden crosses here, it is the subtler presence of Mary which dominates. I visit a Dominican convent to research a future play. In the parlour I meet a curious nun. I tell her I'm a Jew. She looks delighted. 'That's wonderful. Our Lady was a Jewess. She'll be looking at me now in heaven and she'll be so pleased that I'm talking with you.' It's not unusual to encounter nuns who enjoy being with Jews; after all I'm one of the family, in a distant sort of way. I don't remind her that the Dominicans were responsible for the Inquisition. Nor that Sister Gertrude Stein, the convert recently beatified by the Polish Pope, was betrayed by her prioress before dying in Auschwitz. The nun presses my hand warmly and makes me promise to return: a Jewish convert is a rich prize.

○

At Milltown Cemetery there is only the sound of birdsong above the graves of dead Republicans. Above the grave of Bobby Sands. 'Give them their Rights not their last Rites', demands the faded graffiti of the hunger strikes. Punctuating the birdsong is the whirr of British army helicopters watching the IRA graves. Are they checking in case these dead Catholics rise up as a resurrected army of revenge? Onward Christian Soldiers.

○

Am I in Ireland or Britain? Ulster Television is never quite sure. The Charles and Di show goes on as the couple visit the Enniskillen injured. Last week's news of their broken marriage has been supplanted by this public image of domestic unity. 'The couple leave Belfast and return to Britain', says Ulster TV's newscaster. So where are we now? The news continues with a report on David Alton's Abortion Bill. Sixty thousand women travelled from Northern Ireland to England for abortions last year. Abortion is illegal in all 32 counties. The power of Catholic and Protestant church piety supersedes British law even here.

Belfast sometimes has the look of a Latin American shanty town, with its barbed-wire-encased banks, shops and pubs. In the bus travelling through Andersonstown, faces look pinched, pale and bear the mark of undernourishment. I meet a young office worker. Her 50-year old mother has just undergone cancer surgery. A mastectomy six months ago has not prevented a secondary tumour in the ovary. The cancer victim worked as a nurse in London 20 years ago. Part of her job was accompanying patients to X-ray where she stayed with them, unprotected by any lead apron. Is the cancer a result of this or the fruits of Sellafield waste washing into the Irish Sea? Her husband recently suffered a heart attack. Their daughter complains of a persistent chest infection.

These are Europe's poor whites. The news announces a massive government spending scheme for Belfast. East Belfast. Investment is to be poured into the Protestant ghetto to improve employment prospects. This deprived Catholic area is to get nothing. A slogan on a Falls Road wall catches my eye. 'Venceremos!' South America. Belfast.

○

On Friday mornings, near the docks, Belfast's market contrasts with the seeming-affluence of the city centre. Here the stalls sell the dregs of poverty: worn-out '60s clothes; relics from failed American emigration. A man walks through the crowds muttering 'Repent!' under his breath. As he turns his back his jacket preaches — 'Beware of false prophets in sheep's clothing. Ravening wolves bring swift destruction upon themselves.' RTE Radio tells me that 'fat lambs are £40 per head and old bullocks are down'. The Birmingham Six case receives huge coverage in the *Irish Times* and a letter of protest asks why no government official from the Free State represents the falsely accused in London.

Meanwhile thousands are signing Charlie Haughey's condemnation of IRA violence in Enniskillen. 'The gun should be aimed at Charlie Haughey and the bishops' says a Belfast Catholic taxi driver. A Dublin woman speaks of how she only sees Danny Morrisson or Gerry Adams on television when visiting the North: 'in the Free State, RTE doesn't allow Sinn Fein members on screen or radio'. She repeats 'Free State' with irony.

○

My taxi to Aldergrove is stopped by the RUC. The driver and I are called for identity checks. We give our addresses. 'I suppose, being a lady, you don't know your date of birth?', the RUC officer asks unsmilingly. By birthdate I am linked into the central computer which owns all my data. This isn't security; this is the police state. As I fly back to London, lunch is served. Cucumber in sour cream followed by sweet and sour pork is guaranteed to offend Jew, Moslem and vegetarian. Still, the coffee is real. The plane lifts off and a sudden shaft of sunlight bursts over Belfast loch. Back in London I travel to Kings Cross where wreaths and flowers fill the street. This week Belfast was safer.

Julia Pascal

Julia Pascal is a theatre director and writer. She travelled courtesy of British Midland.

ROGER WODDIS

Enough to make you sick

The Matron, unlike you and me,
Believes in doing good by stealth,
And blushes when we learn what she
Is doing to the nation's health.

Her nature, blue in tooth and claw,
Ensures that acquisition thrives,
But she is swift to use the law
To save her face and children's lives.

The quality of patient care
Depends on those who, night and day,
Are skilled at masking their despair
And rub along on nurses' pay.

Tomorrow, when the penny drops,
She'll find a way to pay old debts
By changing hospitals to shops
And flogging booze and cigarettes.

A charge to check our teeth and eyes
Will bring the new Utopia,
Though no optician could devise
A cure for her myopia.

We marvelled when, with hand on heart,
She swore to save the NHS —
An organ Matron, mind apart,
Apparently does not possess.

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BEN PIMLOTT

Labour can't outdo the Tories as the party of prosperity and shouldn't try

IN BRITAIN, writes the Bishop of Durham, 'we have what looks like developing towards a situation in which 25-30 per cent are flourishing, something like 40-45 per cent are in between . . . and something like 30 per cent are frozen out completely.'* Naturally, he has been castigated by *The Times*. 'There is an extreme other-worldliness about the bishop's views on society,' denounces its leader column, 'and contrary to popular belief, other-worldliness is not the authentic mark of pastoral leadership.'

Or, to put it another way, deprivation is out of fashion. True, the problem is not yet completely solved. But with low inflation, high growth and weakened unions, Mrs Thatcher now has it under control. Silly old fuddy-duddy prelate to be so out of touch! In this season of goodwill, it is appropriate for all of us — especially men of the cloth — to celebrate, not denigrate, our deliverance.

In not very different terms, such sentiments have been influencing Labour debates as well. We lost the last three elections, goes the argument, because our policies did not appeal to the better off. The homeless, the black, the old, the out of work — all these are the salt of the earth, but regrettably there aren't enough of them to put us in power. Hence Labour must be the party of the upwardly mobile worker, the council-house buyer, the shareowner, the BUPA policy holder. Labour has to give people of this kind what they want, and what they want is more of the same.

'The central objective of our policy,' Bryan Gould told a party gathering in Northumberland at the weekend, 'must be to convince the British people that we have policies for prosperity.' I would rephrase it. *One* of Labour's objectives should certainly be to seek to create such a conviction. But the first objective must be to show that Labour, for the first time since the 1940s, has the policies to reduce the widening gap between the better off and the poor, and to convince the nation that the small sacrifice which such policies may impose on the majority will be in everybody's interest in the long run.

On prosperity, there is unfortunately a credibility gap. Why should people who lived through the bleak, strike-ridden, rapidly inflating 1970s be persuaded that Labour has suddenly discovered 'policies for prosperity'? Why should anybody who has experienced a sharply improved standard of living since the early 1980s put any faith in the latest Labour package — however up-to-date its contents — or be persuaded that, with Mr Kinnock as prime minister and Mr Smith as chancellor, they would do even better?

I do not doubt that the attempt should be made, or that Labour economists should busy themselves preparing a document that makes arithmetical sense, and enables shadow ministers to speak without embarrassment. There is certainly a colossal inferiority complex to be overcome. I simply question whether it will be possible for Labour ever to match the materialist appeal of the Tories.

Rather, the first job of Labour should be to demolish the myth of economic problems almost solved, and look for remedies that will benefit those in greatest need of them. We do not have to talk of compassion or social conscience — soft-headed words in these harsh times. We need to speak of the necessity, which many prosperous people feel in their bones, of preventing our society from cracking up.

LAST WEEK the Unemployment Unit, a non-party pressure group dedicated to sweeping nasty things out from under the carpet, drew attention to the failure of the government's Restart programme. In the period up to August, 1.2 million unemployed people were called to compulsory Restart interviews. More than a third of a million never turned up — risking loss of benefit, and the removal of their names from the register. Of those who did, barely 1 in 18 went onto a scheme, or directly into work, as a result. In short, the main effects of the programme have been to save the government money and improve the unemployment statistics.

> ***The first job of Labour should be to demolish the myth of economic problems almost solved . . . We need to speak of the necessity of preventing our society from cracking up***

The numbers game is an old one — and Restart is not the only placebo intended to disguise from the patient the extent of the disease. Probably (according to the Unit), unemployment is falling by only two-thirds of the amount the government claims, putting us back to spring 1983, when the total was three times the level of 1979. In 1979 terms, if allowance is made for adjustments in methods of counting, today's official figure ought to be 3.2 million not 2.7 million. If those on temporary schemes and YTS are thrown in, this rises to 3.9 million.

At a recent seminar held at the Birkbeck public policy centre, Paul Corrigan, the social researcher, recounted a remark made by a woman to his team: 'All I want is to count as unemployed!' To 'count as unemployed' is a modest aspiration, but it can be a serious one. Since the election, the simple expedient of taking away benefits has gathered pace. In October, the government announced its intention to extend the penalty period for people deemed to have 'voluntarily' left work from three months to six. It has also introduced new rules for National Insurance payments that will exclude many women from unemployment benefit. Meanwhile, it is coping with youth unemployment by abolishing it. From September 1988 all but a handful of minors will receive no benefit and 120,000 will be removed from the register at the stroke of a pen.

The long-term effects of redistributing away from the weakest members of society and in favour of those with greater clout have yet to be discovered. For the moment, however, we need to observe that the damage done to those out of work is only part of the problem. Indeed, unemployment has become an inadequate term to describe a very widespread malaise. 'For the 87 per cent in work,' Lord Young declared last year, 'the country has never had as good a time as it has today.' It is tragic that this untruth was never effectively exposed.

The reality is of millions of people whose lives are dominated by the scarcity of jobs yet who never count — even in their own minds — as unemployed. There is the downward spiral in employment of workers who once held skilled jobs. There are those in work who cannot change jobs or risk a period without one. There are the unknown numbers of people who spurn the pittance offered by the state, and pick up pin money on the margins of the economy. And there is the vast shift, of which the figures barely take account, from full-time to ill-paid, often badly exploited, part-time work.

WHAT HAS occurred is a social upheaval, carried through in less than a decade, and involving the habits and experience and expectations of a higher proportion of the population even than the Bishop of Durham's 30 per cent. In this upheaval, the concept of 'unemployment', a quaint nineteenth-century term, has changed its meaning. There is no longer a single, definable condition. Instead there are shades of uncertainty, poverty and job dissatisfaction, which cannot be quantified in statistics.

Parts of our country have changed out of recognition. Parts of our society are stuck in a mire of inactivity. In the North, there are today 36 per cent fewer jobs in manufacturing than in 1979. Nationally, one black or brown person in four — even by official figures — is out of work. Meanwhile the hardest core of unmistakeable unemployment, those without a job for five years, continues to increase.

According to the opinion polls, the government is persuading more people than ever of its success. Yet its actual failure has been massive. How to tackle the failure remains the big challenge facing the Labour Party policy review. It will be foolish and faint-hearted to chase the will o' the wisp of popularity, calculated on a head count of the better off — and it will not work. If Labour is to earn votes it has to earn respect, and that can only be done by showing that the plight of the weak is a problem for all of us, and that tackling it is our very first priority. □

**New Socialist*, December 1987

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Poland votes for and against reform

WHAT IS surprising about Sunday's referendum in Poland is that the results surprised anyone. Presented with something as apparently straightforward as a two-question referendum, requiring answers yes or no, only the Poles, locked into their post-Solidarity impasse, could have contrived to produce a scoreboard where all interested parties claimed to have won.

General Jaruzelski, in a relatively free plebiscite, was able to entice 67 per cent of the eligible voters to take part in political activity. That the turnout figures were not disputed by the Solidarity opposition suggests that confrontation has moved to another level. Seen against the backdrop of a continuing policy of inclusion (elections, amnesties, consultative councils) aimed at bringing a distrustful Polish population into contact with an isolated elite, this was a minor victory for the regime.

That said, only 11 million voters out of 26 million opted for 'Jaruzelski's' programme. Since it included a 'radical economic cure' and 'deep democratisation' of political life, one is left to muse on how the regime would have responded to a binding vote (51 per cent *of the electorate*) for *or* against either of these options. The referendum now does not 'settle the question', but simply provides an 'opinion'. From this uncertainty a new political reality is even less likely to emerge. The leadership will be able to rationalise any of its subsequent measures by pointing to one or other segment of the people's voice.

What of Solidarity's boycott? The eight million abstainers were not all politically conscious regime opponents, but nonetheless represent a critical mass of the unincorporated society. Many simply saw the whole exercise as irrelevant, flawed, over-hasty, suspect or a needless intrusion into their day of rest. Paradoxically, most of the most authentic supporters of both sets of reform excluded themselves and so lost a chance to force the regime's hand.

In doing so, they allowed the referendum to be decided by those who voted 'No' to either or both questions. They robbed Jaruzelski of a clear vote of confidence by both turning out and voting 'No'. They thus ensured that creeping institutional adaptation, disguised beneath the rhetoric of reform, would remain the order of the day. Bureaucrats threatened with accountability and all those who prefer to manage crisis rather than resolve it will take heart from the referendum's outcome.

Authentic dialogue between the rulers and the ruled in Poland requires that the forms of this dialogue, be they more democratic elections, a second parliamentary chamber or further national and local referenda, cannot be compromised from the outset. It is not that the Poles lack experience in direct democracy or are frightened by the harsh alternatives put to them, as the government would have it. Simply put, democratic forms must be created by them and not for them. Solidarity, for all its faults, was an example of just that.

George Kolankiewicz

The author is lecturer in sociology at the University of Essex.

Ambulance chasing

TONY PHILLIPS, a quietly spoken 30-year old, wanted to be an ambulanceman. His five years as a hospital porter as well as time spent in the Royal Army Medical Corps Volunteers made him eminently suitable.

So when four ambulance vacancies were advertised last year, he applied. He easily passed the tests for maths, English, driving and dexterity, and in late 1986 the final assessment at interview put him second (out of 185) applicants.

After the interviewing panel decided to offer Phillips the job, the next step was to take up references. The reference from his head porter was considered 'almost too good to be true' by his intending colleagues, and they called to check that the head porter had indeed written it. Then the ambulance service training officer, a Mr Dodd, approached the nursing officer, Sister Ross, for a reference. She was not listed as a referee, and Phillips was not told of this approach.

Dodd didn't get her to fill in the reference form but asked her questions and made notes himself on the form. She has since rejected the imputations ascribed to her in these notes of her alleged answers, which referred to Tony Phillips' 'permanent chip on his shoulder regarding his colour', and preferring to 'wear a white coat or theatre gown which he has stated makes him feel on a par with his fellow white workers'. Why, he even had the temerity to 'take offence at any remarks made towards him regarding his colour or working attitude, even though they may seem petty and passed in a joking manner.'

Sister Ross was also asked about 'anonymous' phone calls which had been made against the application, although Dodd later denied mentioning them. Sister Ross was so concerned at what she saw as an 'unusual' request, she told Tony Phillips about it — just before he was turned down as an ambulance person.

Using that second reference — no other application required such extra scrutiny — a 'committee of senior ambulancemen' rejected him.

This week a Liverpool industrial tribunal awarded Tony Phillips £1,000 compensation and unanimously ruled that his rejection was a clear case of racial discrimination by the Mersey Regional Health Authority. As the euphemistic legal record has it, 'the tribunal did not find Mr Dodd a convincing witness and where there was conflict between his evidence and that of Sister Ross, they preferred the latter.'

But Phillips wasn't fighting for the money: 'I've got two kids myself. If this can happen, no matter how many O or A levels they've got, what chance do they have in 15 years?'

At the Tribunal, it was disclosed that there was one black ambulance person out of the 509 in the service. Now it will be interesting to see what the Health Authority does. Since their proportions of black staff range from zero in one department to a dizzy 3½ per cent in the highest category, nursing, compared with 8 per cent in the local population, there is little cause for optimism.

Ian Williams

Tube discontents run deep

'THEY TELL YOU that you have to abide by the rules, but they don't tell you you need a doctorate in ambiguity,' observes the driver as his train rattles and lurches through the darkness of a deep-level tube line. At every station, the visual messages about the railway's priorities are similarly confused. The driver points to newish grime starting to tarnish platforms that have recently undergone extensive refurbishing. He also points down to the track. The troughs that run under the rails at tube stations are known as suicide pits, or anti-suicide pits. They don't stop suicides, but they make it easier to clear the remains away without having to jack up the train. The traps at each end of King's Cross, a week after the fire, are still packed with combustible litter and debris.

Comments from many Underground workers reveal deep-seated concern about standards of service and safety that extends far beyond fears of a repetition of the King's Cross disaster.

One of the most contentious issues facing public transport in London is one-person operation — OPO. On the buses, it slows down services and removes the potential for assistance to the public that a conductor provides. On surface or sub-surface lines (the Circle, District and Metropolitan), the removal of guards has led to a spate of complaints from drivers. They dislike the design of the control modifications that enable them to operate the doors. It is all too easy, they explain, to open the doors on the track side of the train in error. Numerous incidents appear to bear this out. The drivers also criticise the reliability and efficiency of the TV monitors, mirrors and radios that have replaced their human colleagues.

One driver warned of the likelihood of a serious accident. Moderate to the point of diffidence, he was ready to endorse London Regional Transport's redefinition as a business. But even he was clearly unhappy about the central contradiction between profit and public service. 'I don't think the majority of drivers are that union-oriented,' he commented, 'they just feel the public deserves a lot more safety and consideration. With the government's present policy of finances first, we can't allow ourselves to do that.'

The safety problems of OPO enter a different order of magnitude when extended to the deep-level tubes, which run, on average, 80 feet down. The first to convert was the Piccadilly, whose guards departed last August. 'I won't travel on the

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Piccadilly Line any more,' says one ticket collector flatly. What he and many of his colleagues fear is an outbreak of fire on a train. On full-crewed trains, the drill is relatively simple. The driver evacuates the passengers in the portion of the train in front of the fire, and the guard takes care of the rear. Short-circuiting devices permit passengers to be led to safety along the track. What happens now to the people in the back half of a train without a guard? staff are asking. One imagines the nightmare scenario of a fire in the leading car, just behind the driver. He also points out that, without a guard, there is nothing to stop passengers fleeing an emergency through the rear cab, possibly onto live rails or into the path of an oncoming train.

The procedure proposed for coping with an incapacitated driver meets with a mixture of derision and alarm. Known as 'leapfrogging', it requires the driver of the train following to drive up, walk through to the front of the affected train and take it away. Before abandoning his own train, he is to put a 'responsible' member of the public in charge!

Two more general themes emerge from the comments of those who operate London's vast underground railway. One is of a crisis in morale, and the other is of deep scepticism about management's commitment to safety. Inquiries about morale produce a terse show of unanimity: 'Very low' — 'Very very low' — 'Rock bottom' — 'Zero minus zero'.

The last comes from a railman at one of the busiest stations in the central area. He describes widespread absenteeism and depression, and accuses management of being 'completely out of touch with the workforce'.

His duties include watching out for incidents and hazards, and checking the platforms. Indicator boards are frequently incorrect, and attempts to find out what is happening reveal a lack of co-ordination. 'You get answers like "It'll be there", or "We don't know where that one is".' The job titles of those responsible, controllers and regulators, 'probably contravene the Trades Descriptions Act'. One of the Underground's junior managers observes that 'platform staff don't get enough support for trying to justify managerial decisions they don't understand'.

The railman notes that he'd 'never seen rubbish moved out of stations so fast in my life', in the wake of the disaster. Some workers speak of top management's 'criminal responsibility' for King's Cross. A driver states bluntly that he doesn't think LRT 'gives a damn about the Health and Safety at Work Act'. This is echoed by a union full-timer, who relates it to the loss of 'the old railwayman attitude. The old board of directors had been on railways all their lives. Now these people, they're accountants, people who couldn't give a monkey's about it. Fast-buck merchants, that's all they are.'

More drily, a Met driver comments: 'I've always said that people in Broadway (LRT's headquarters) have forgotten what a train looks like, and we should send a photo of one every year, just to remind them what business they're in.'

The idea that the King's Cross fire was started by a cigarette gets short shrift. 'Most of us think it was either an electrical fault or possibly some form of arson,' says a member of the King's Cross station staff. He suggests that a smoking ban reassures the public — during the runup to Christmas — that London Underground Ltd is taking action, and that it is the cheapest way of improving safety.

'Morale is very low at the station itself. It was never very high anyway. After some of the scathing reports that have come out in the press, particularly the *Sun*, passengers have been coming up to staff and saying "where were you on the night?", then calling them 'murderers' and every other insult they can think of.

'But some members of the public *are* actually expressing sympathy. Not many, just one or two.

'One staff member, who saved 29 people on the night, including four from that booking hall area, is going through a bad spell of nightmares, hearing the screams of people he couldn't save, even though he went back into the smoke a second time.'

One word summarises the root cause of all the various discontents amongst Underground workers. The King's Cross man says that his colleagues also use it to explain the disaster: 'Most of them put it down to cuts'.

Marek Kohn

'I don't live here any more'

Marital discord is rising dramatically in Bradford. The local council has noticed a large increase in the number of electoral forms being returned bearing only the husband or wife's name.

One woman answering the door with her teenage daughter, both looking thoroughly at home, denied strenuously to an electoral register canvasser that she lived in the house. In Camden and Islington, the trendies are trying hard to convince canvassers that they really live in their Norfolk dachas.

So far, only widespread ignorance of the poll tax has prevented this type of behaviour from becoming the norm. The bill is due to begin its parliamentary career next week, and reluctance to sign on the register will grow as the implementation date — 1989 in Scotland, 1990 in England and Wales — approaches. (The government has no plans to introduce the tax in Northern Ireland, a tacit recognition that civil strife there makes it unenforceable.)

This passive resistance to the poll tax will undoubtedly result in increasingly intrusive attempts by local authorities to ensure that their registers are accurate. The Labour council in Worcester warned last week that it may prosecute more than 400 people for not completing their electoral registration forms because it reckons it could lose £100,000 in revenue. But the problem of non-registration and non-collection will be much more acute in the inner cities, where mobility is greater. It does not take a sociologist to work out that most of those not registering are likely to be poorer. A substantial number of people in the inner cities have already voluntarily, or through ignorance, disenfranchised themselves. This tax will increase this number of non-citizens.

Glasgow's treasurer, Bill English, is working on the basis that 20 per cent of the tax will remain uncollected, which puts the bill up by a quarter for those who do pay. All the government's calculations of poll tax levies are based on the ridiculous assumption of 100 per cent collection.

During the passage of the Scottish bill, the government suggested that the registration officer would seek information from council housing departments, lists of applicants for bus passes, library tickets, improvement grants, and so on. One minister even said: 'It is commonsense that inquiries to solicitors about who bought houses and so on will be part and parcel of the information collected'.

The National Council for Civil Liberties argues convincingly that behind the publicly available register will have to be a second secret file, explaining the basis on which the first is compiled. If Ms Smith is now shacked up with Mr Jones, the local council will have to be able to justify their action in sending her bill to his address.

The Chartered Institute for Public Finance Accountancy recommended in a briefing for Scottish councils that to keep tabs on people, it would be necessary to allocate everyone a 'personal identifier'. To avoid the 'I don't live here anymore' syndrome developing into a national disease, it is difficult to see how the government can reject that recommendation, even though it has promised that there will be no identity card.

None of this has really sunk in to the great British public. But as they are a very private lot, it's likely they will make a fuss about this issue which, objectively, seems less important than those they are prepared to ignore, like the collapse of the health service. Even if they haven't much to hide in their Surbiton semis, they will want to make damn sure they retain the right to hide it.

Christian Wolmar

If the caption fits

No 46

A tough one for you all this time: Arthur Scargill putting himself about to make sure he's re-elected in January as NUM president. At least he's had the sense to cover his head. Captions or speech bubbles by Monday 14 December. Winner gets a ten-pound book token.

No 44: Winner

David Frost and Jeffrey Archer: 'Unfortunately we can only show you a picture of Lot 17.' (*Stephen Engelhard, London.*) Runner-up (no prize): 'Going, going, gone! Sold to the man with the straitjacket for £1,000.' (*J. Gubbay, London.*)

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FIRST PERSON

For their own good

On holiday in a quiet Devonshire village, I found myself in the local video shop trying to persuade my pals to hire *9½ Weeks*. I noticed out of the corner of my eye a young, working-class couple reaching for a video about group sex. They had been hovering near the 'Adults Only' shelf for some time, casting nervous glances in our direction. Our film nestled safely between *Superman 2* and *Gorky Park*; we could reach for it without any twinge of embarrassment. Their film, on the other hand, was pornographic; an infantile object choice belittled by the artful sado-masochism of *9½ Weeks*. Perhaps Norman Tebbit had a point when he said it was hypocritical to ban Page Three when bare breasts in the National Gallery are allowed to go unscathed.

Al Goldstein, publisher of *Screw* magazine in the USA, made a similar point to a gathering of Oxford University students a few weeks ago. He said: 'You make me puke because you buy a bound copy of the *Kama Sutra* for £25 but if a lorry driver wants to look at a picture of a topless girl somehow that's illegal.' Mr Goldstein may be penis-oriented, but he's certainly not one for phallocentric abstractions: 'When I jerk off, I know that god gave me a hand and a cock. If he'd just given me a cock and no hand then he'd be the devil, but he gave me everything I need to give myself pleasure.'

Flora McCullough from St Hilda's objected softly: 'In pornography there is no feeling — fantasy feeds the mind's hunger for delusion.' So somewhere between arousal and the act lies feeling, the source of an 'authentic', 'mature' sexuality. I can't help thinking that the young Devonshire couple in the video shop might feel intensely patronised by that opinion. Especially as she later went on to say that society had a duty to 'protect those who cannot protect themselves'. Needless to say, she favoured the motion seeking to ban all public displays of pornography.

During this stylish debate, my companion focused her attention on an extraordinarily handsome Secretary, Noel Sy-Quia. She, in a classic case of objectification, whispered: 'I'd like to take him home and hang him on my wall.'

Meanwhile, back on the floor of the chamber, Big Al was trying to make wickedness absolvable while some of the feminists on the other side were trying to pretend that it didn't exist — except, of course, in male form. Yet surely we women are grown-up enough to confront the darkness which conflicts with our political selves. If we could, we might begin to dislodge some of the investment that we, as women, have in pornography. After all, sex, cruelty and sadomasochistic fantasies are by no means exclusive to men.

Cynthia Payne of Streatham fame looked puzzled: 'I deal with elderly men on their own who have lost partners and only have their memories left.' Pornography, she believes, can be used to enrich people's lives. But perhaps this says more about the alienated aspects of ourselves and our relationships rather than about the public display of dirty books.

Even Big Al admits: 'Pornography is boring, shoddy, second-rate, depersonalising. It's bad but it gets singled out because we have so much self hatred about sex.'

Loretta Loach

POLITICAL SKETCH

No home comforts from Ridley

Ed Pearce

WE KNOW that Nicholas Ridley is a trained engineer and an accomplished water colourist. It is just that his manner as he approaches the Commons best recalls the occupant of a punt at Maidenhead or Henley in and around 1909. Languor is not in it as he wearily explains to the uncomprehending elements opposite the virtues under his Housing Bill of a private rented sector given wider scope, if hardly a full free market.

He is supported, if that is quite the word, by a former Housing Minister, Ian Gow, whose deliber-ate e-nun-ci-at-ion of wo-ords for the slow-witted perfectly recalls Ian MacDonald, of the Ministry of Defence, who briefed the world in exigious slow motion throughout the Falk-lands Cri-sis.

Against them, Clive Soley, one of Labour's unsung and little noticed regulars, managed, whatever the imperfections of his case, to strike a tone which was impressively right psychologically. It was also nicely outside the usual sub-divisions of hard, medium and soft left. Clive Soley on the homeless manages to sound like old-fashioned Labour — which is intended as a compliment.

He was fortunate, of course, in Nicholas Ridley's grand style. Speaking of shorthold tenancies, the Minister observed that such rentings would be appropriate to 'people who have a spare house that they wish to let.' I hope Labour has good reflexes and a fine palate. This is one of those phrases, like 'the pound in your pocket' and 'at the stroke of a pen' which the other side delights in setting in large type.

Labour should run this golden fluid ounce of Ridleyan grandeur over tongue and palate like one of those vintages so earnestly plugged in weekly periodicals. And this is no New Zealand Cabernet; this is one of your authentic — buy now and lay down for young Freddie — better sorts of Burgundy. As the bed and breakfast lists lengthen and the unhoused gather in the public conscience, I would expect to see it coming onto the rhetorical wine list of every opposition politician of discernment.

Housing is a dangerous territory, full of mines and technical ha-has. Soley complained bitterly about the existence of a mortgage tax allowance costing £4.5 billion — one billion of which goes to people with incomes over £20,000 a year. But he didn't offer to reform it! This was last proposed by Michael Meacher, notoriously unworldly in his dealings and *he* was promptly repudiated. The conservatism of the Labour Party and their desire to leave most things pretty sweetly either as they are, or as they should have been, must be a comfort to somebody. But it is the other aspect of Labour — a passion for the council house — which, despite Soley's impressive ability to give a full and bitter account of the enlisted regiment of the homeless, leaves him defending less credibly the all-wise local authority.

There is a Labour tendency to talk about 'our people' and to look at things from a position of paternal, but also politically remunerated, provision. It isn't an ignoble posture, but it is one increasingly archaic and short of the arithmetic to make it work. The Secretary of State gave indeed very little reason, apart from an interesting piece of information about Nationwide Anglia's plans to build blocks of flats for rent, to think that his bill would bring housing to those who have it not. Nothing suggests a sudden release onto the market of dramatically cheaper accommodation to which people in most need can happily turn. On the other hand Labour, having lost a key upper section of 'our people', is forced to argue for public housing in terms which suggest that nothing had happened socially in the last 20 years.

WHAT CLIVE Soley was really addressing himself to was the large underclass of people whom the market does not reach and for whom public provision, old-style, is the only viable hope. But he said nothing about the atrocious breeze-block Bastilles put up by peremptory benevolence in conditions of municipal monopoly. Labour may have lost more votes in the Desolation Towers estates gaily erected in the mid-sixties than it ever did from Tony Benn.

The parties tend, on this topic, to face each other across a modest abyss of certainty. The minister speaks dynastically on these matters — the 1937 and 1945 interdepartmental committees on the rent restrictions act 'were chaired by my father and were widely known as the Ridley Committees. He is certain that what he calls 'a choice of landlord' will guarantee the tenant of the local authority something better than 'the appalling conditions in which tenants on some of the larger estates in our inner cities have to live'.

'In the worst of these areas,' said Ridley, 'the problems are beyond the powers of the local authorities to deal with them.' He proposes Housing Action Trusts, 'short-term bodies equipped to rake over large areas of rundown council housing to refurbish them before passing them on to new forms of management'.

What we really listened to on Monday, though nobody would admit to it, was a conflict between two sorts of paternalism, both well-intended, each faced with a state of affairs so dire that all optimism looks out of place.

Desperate but not serious, the old Austrian tag, probably best describes the state of housing at the lower end of society. The conditions are indeed desperate, but they are the conditions of people whose vote is already either secured or never to be cast. Elections can get themselves lost on the psephocidal poll tax. Accordingly, our minds will be vastly more alerted when the poll tax comes. It offends people who might vote either way. The tentative dab at a rent market is probably neither the offensive irrelevance Clive Soley thinks it, nor 'the major step forward' claimed by the minister. It might be best to see low-cost housing as a melancholy shore where well-intentioned armies orate by night. □

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Trident becomes Mrs Thatcher's surprise ace

As Reagan and Gorbachev shake hands on a historic deal to cut nuclear weapons in Europe,* PAUL ROGERS *reveals that Britain's Trident missiles will become the centrepiece of NATO's first-strike strategy. The British defence debate is about to be shaken up

On the eve of the summit, NATO military circles are already talking about 'compensation' — replacing cruise and Pershing missiles with weapons not covered by the INF treaty. Coming to the fore is the idea of adopting Britain's new Trident force as a key component of NATO's nuclear war planning.

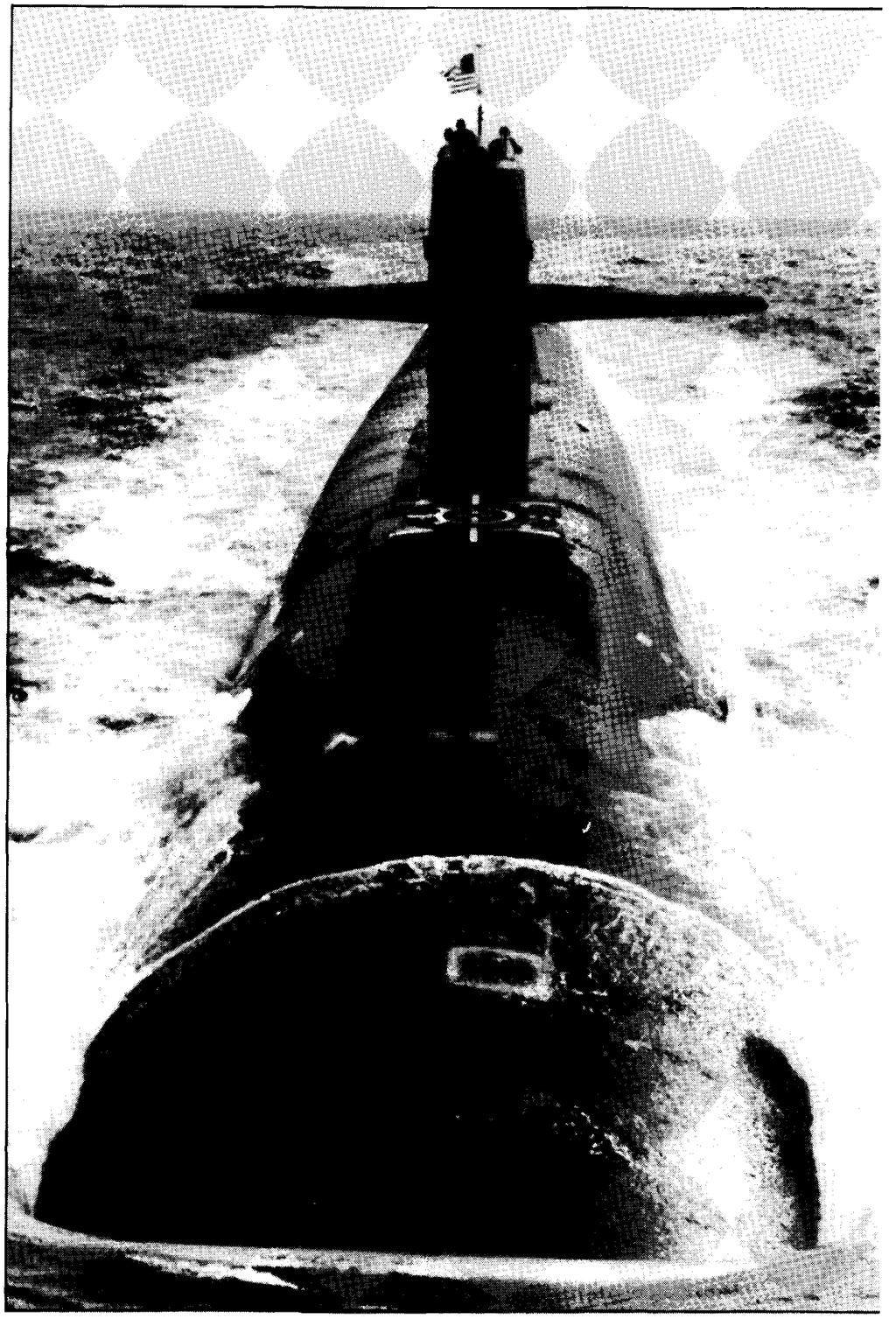
The zero option to be agreed in Washington involves NATO withdrawing two quite different missiles — the ground-launched cruise and the Pershing 2 ballistic missile. Cruise missiles are quite easy to replace, and among the options are:

- B-52 bombers based in Britain carrying air-launched cruise missiles
- submarine-launched cruise missiles on submarines operating out of Holy Loch
- sea-launched cruise missiles from a surface flotilla, possibly based at Portsmouth
- reinforced F-111 bomber squadrons at Upper Heyford and Lakenheath.

Such obvious compensation would, however, cause a public outcry in western Europe, as it would be tantamount to open cheating against the treaty. Even so, the French and right-wing German politicians are pushing for it, and the British delegation at the recent NATO Nuclear Planning Group meeting at Monterey gave strong support. Wiser counsel within NATO, particularly Lord Carrington, will ensure that no action will be taken before the INF treaty is ratified next spring, and even then, compensation will be described purely as modernisation.

In any case, cruise missiles at Greenham and elsewhere are far less important to NATO than the Pershing 2 missiles currently based in West Germany. They are a centrepiece of NATO's nuclear strategy, so much so that their proposed withdrawal is the main reason the Soviet Union has been prepared to concede so much to get an agreement.

NATO'S NUCLEAR strategy is the so-called 'flexible response' approach — willingness to use nuclear weapons first if a conventional war is going badly. It was evolved in the late 1960s and involves nuclear targeting plans on a vast scale. These plans are drawn up by NATO's Nuclear Activities Branch at SHAPE headquarters at



Deadly and accurate: are Trident-carrying submarines the key to a first-use nuclear strategy?

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Mons in Belgium, where a Nuclear Operations Plan is produced.

Until recently, NATO planned two levels of nuclear strikes. The first was the selective use of five to 100 nuclear warheads, mainly short-range weapons such as artillery shells, against Warsaw Pact armed forces directly engaged in combat. If that failed to stop them, a general nuclear response would be made, involving hundreds or thousands of nuclear weapons and integrated into a strategic United States attack on the Soviet Union.

There have been two recent subtle changes to this approach. Until last year, it was assumed that NATO would hold back until facing defeat in a conventional war before escalating to nuclear weapons. Now, however, early use is the policy. Nuclear planners at NATO HQ talk openly of demonstration shots with nuclear weapons at the beginning of hostilities. General Bernard Rogers, who recently retired as NATO commander, admitted this shift to early use of nuclear weapons in an interview with *International Defence Review* last year. He told *IDR* that he is instructed by his political masters: 'Before you lose the cohesiveness of the alliance — that is, before you are subject to [conventional Soviet military] penetration on a fairly broad scale — you *will* request, not you may, but you *will* request the use of nuclear weapons' (emphasis in the original).

The second change to NATO's nuclear strategy is even more recent. West Germany has naturally long been horrified by the thought that NATO could actually use nuclear weapons against Warsaw Pact forces on West German soil in the first phase of a 'flexible response': the effect would be obviously devastating for their own country. The West Germans have been trying for 20 years to get NATO to adopt a policy of immediate escalation to nuclear attacks on Soviet territory. Finally, just last year, NATO's nuclear guidelines were re-written to this effect. This profound development was made much easier by the recent deployment of a weapon ideally suited to such a strategy: the Pershing 2 missile.

The Pershing 2 is a very fast, yet highly accurate, missile. It is capable of hitting command centres, missile silos and hardened nuclear weapons stores well inside the Soviet Union within twelve minutes of being launched. It is at least ten years in advance of any Soviet weapon and is regarded within NATO as a near-ideal nuclear war-fighting weapon, probably the most significant nuclear weapon to come into service in 30 years.

Now Pershing 2 is going, much to the initial dismay of NATO's nuclear strategists. In response, NATO is turning rapidly to Britain's new Trident missile force as the nearest thing to a replacement for Pershing 2.

BRITAIN'S POLARIS missiles — and Trident — have never been seen by NATO as an independent deterrent. They have always been part of NATO's European theatre nuclear forces. Indeed, when the Trident decision was announced by the Conservative government back in 1980, NATO's own journal, *NATO Review*, welcomed the decision purely as a way of enhancing NATO's nuclear forces.

Weapons such as Polaris *could* be used independently. Indeed, *New Statesman* revealed in August 1984 how the war cabinet deployed a Polaris submarine to the South Atlantic during the Falklands War. But this was an exception to the rule which is that Polaris is targeted by NATO nuclear planners as part of NATO strategy. The coordinates are selected at SHAPE headquarters.

Polaris itself has been of relatively little value to NATO. The missile warheads are inaccurate and cannot be independently targeted. But Trident is quite a different matter, especially the advanced Trident D5 missile which Britain is buying (or should we say renting?). This is by far the most accurate submarine-launched ballistic missile likely to be deployed this century. The US Navy will also have D5 missiles, but these form part of US strategic forces. They won't be available to NATO for targeting. Not so Britain's missiles, which will come far closer than any other NATO weapon to the capabilities of Pershing 2.

The Trident D5 is not quite as accurate as Pershing. But the D5 carries a larger nuclear warhead and will be nearly as effective in destroying protected targets. Britain's Trident submarines will be able to use the same patrol areas as the current Polaris submarines, allocated under a water space agreement with the United States and including waters west of Ireland. From these waters, the Trident D5 missiles could be launched on depressed trajectories to hit targets in the Soviet Union as quickly as Pershing 2.

The INF treaty is bad news for NATO nuclear strategists because of the loss of Pershing 2. But Britain's Trident will be a very good substitute, even though this has considerable implications for the British political scene. It demolishes the idea that Britain's missiles form an independent deterrent. Their prime purpose will be to contribute to a more far-reaching first-use strategy — and Trident will be very much more important to this strategy than Polaris. In fact, it will be the key to it.

The idea of first use of nuclear weapons is highly unpopular with the British public. Even the Church of England Synod has opposed it. It really is difficult to see how the Labour or Liberal parties could reconcile themselves to Trident in a post-INF world in which it was deployed for aggressive first-use strikes against the Soviet Union. □

Paul Rogers is a defence analyst at Bradford University.

BEATING THE BLUES

5 December 1987

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LABOUR'S TASK

Fear and loathing in the working classes

Do social changes condemn the Labour Party to decline?

JOHN RENTOUL *and*
JANE RATFORD *report*

MR GOULD is the real power behind the scenes in the Labour Party. No, not Bryan Gould, he's only the next leader of the party. It's Philip Gould, 36, a former advertising executive, now the party's market researcher, who wields the real influence.

On 20 November Gould and his partner Deborah Mattinson put on the now celebrated slideshow for the shadow cabinet and the party's national executive. What the leaders of the party saw and heard as they munched their popcorn was like a horror movie called *Fear and Loathing in C1s and C2s*. Published and unpublished opinion polls showed that three-quarters of the electorate cite 'extremism' as a reason for not voting Labour, followed by 'weak leadership' and defence policy. What's worse, Labour support is very passive. Three times as many Labour voters as Conservatives say the main reason they vote for their party is tradition and habit. As if that weren't bad enough, most of these habitual Labour people think of themselves as working class, and the numbers of people who describe themselves as working class is steadily declining.

Thus far the slideshow was all numbers and charts, gloomy but not somehow of the real world. Then came the voices of real electors, collected by 'qualitative' research. (This is a rather grand term for sitting people down in small groups and talking to them; it is how multi-national corporations sell their products — and several big unions.) 'Fear' was a word that cropped up frequently, especially among soft Tory voters, some of whom are sympathetic to many Labour policies. They have got used to the Conservative government and don't know what to expect of a Labour one.

Real voices

You can hear those voices any time you care to. We talked to Labour defectors in Putney, a Labour marginal in south London, and found the same themes:

- 'I didn't vote Labour last time because Neil Kinnock doesn't seem able to control the party. At least, that's the way it's given to us by the media' (Male skilled manual worker, non-union member, council tenant)
- 'The only good thing that has come out of this government for the unions is the secret ballot. It has given the unions back to their members. People like Scargill have tried to monopolise power in the past' (Male clerical worker, union member, council tenant, Alliance voter)
- 'All this talk about gay rights makes children inquisitive. Livingstone and Labour are pushing that issue far too much' (Female pensioner, council tenant)

> *'The Labour Party's political failure is actually more important than social changes'*

- 'Some of the ideas the Alliance had on the NHS seemed very sensible. They're not in favour of private medicine and they seem to want to make the NHS more efficient, not just pour money into it like Labour' (Male pensioner, formerly a supervisor, council tenant, Alliance voter)

Qualitative research isn't very scientific compared with opinion polling, but it is an essential part of understanding why people decide to vote the way they do. It helps to explain, for instance, why the 1986 British Social Attitudes survey found large and increasing majorities for 'Labour' policies on health, education and jobs among an electorate that was shortly to return a Tory government. Qualitative research shows that people want greater spending on collective services, but only if they are sure they will benefit. In the election, too many people felt that their individual prosperity was too fragile to risk for uncertain collective gain.

If anything, the Philip Gould horror show erred on the side of optimism. It cited another British Social Attitudes survey finding that the electorate has moved to the left since 1983 in its answers to questions about the trade-off between inflation and unemployment, the choice between higher taxes for better services and tax and service cuts and the gap between people on high and low incomes. People have also moved decisively against wanting any further privatisations (*NS* 30 October).

But don't take too much comfort. The electorate appears to have 'moved to the left' on these questions because circumstances have 'moved to the right'. Inflation appears to be less of a threat, so people put less stress on fighting it. The tax burden is felt to be lighter (although as a proportion of national income it is still much heavier than in 1979), so people feel able to afford a little more, especially for services which are perceived as having been cut. The gap between rich and poor is visibly wider and widening.

Ray of hope

There is a ray of hope for Labour. It is a truism that social changes have been eroding the party's class base. The political scientist's equivalent of the *A to Z — How Britain Votes*, by Heath, Jowell and Curtice — calculated that if the various social classes had voted in 1987 as they did in 1964, then Labour could have won only 37-39 per cent of the vote, instead of the 45 per cent Harold Wilson achieved. This study projected the 1964 results forward, taking into account changes in home ownership as well as the expansion of the middle classes and the shrinking of the working classes since then.

Anthony Heath has now added changes in union membership to the equation (*Political Quarterly*, Department of Politics, 10 Gower Street, London WC1); this is because union membership, like a voter's housing, seems to have a strong influence on party support, independent of social class. This extra factor raises the potential Labour vote in 1987 to 40 per cent — enough for an overall majority in the Commons. This June Labour got just 32 per cent of the vote — which means that the party's *political* failure is actually more important than social changes.

In other words, though the class-based potential Labour vote is now much lower, Labour need not necessarily lose. The party can't blame social changes entirely, it must also blame itself. Or, as Philip Gould would doubtless put it, the *product*. The slideshow he presented to the party's leaders was not simply a demonstration of the problems which Labour faces, it was also an implicit endorsement of the solution. Labour is a product to be sold, and Philip Gould's speciality just happens to be selling the product. Watch this space. □

WHAT IS ALL THE COMMOTION, MANUEL?!
WE'VE GOT A HOT ONE HERE, SIR, SOME MINISTER FROM THE U.S. SAYS HE'S CHECKING ON POSSIBLE HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES IN THIS COUNTRY.
HUMAN RIGHTS, ABUSES?! THAT'S RIGHT.
WELL THERE AREN'T ANY HERE, SO YOU MIGHT AS WELL GET ON THE NEXT PLANE HOME!!
UH, WOULD YOU MIND IF I LOOK AROUND JUST TO MAKE SURE?..
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DE-MERGER

Cut, stitch, patch and a few tears

As the merger talks between the Liberal and Social Democratic parties run into trouble,* SARAH BENTON *analyses the regional tensions which threaten the whole enterprise

IN THE HISTORY of parties, splits have been far more seductive than mergers. So as the negotiators for the two Alliance parties meet for another round of cutting and stitching they should perhaps congratulate themselves on the odd-shaped garment they have produced so far. In fact, the last effective merger in Britain was to form the British Communist Party in 1920. That party form lasted, give or take a few Comintern diktats, for 50 years before it began to come apart at the seams. But those early mergerites were impelled by the Russian revolution and the wonderful optimism that history was on their side. While many Liberals also believe that history is on their side, their vision is less apocalyptic. It is fear of a future of never quite getting there that drives most of them on.

It is the Liberals who have been the problem so far. The SDP negotiators have one overwhelming advantage. The bitter arguments over the summer finally divided the party between those who want a merger at virtually any price and those who want nothing to do with this camel designed by committee. The National Committee, to whom the SDP negotiators are in principle accountable, embodies this division. Half of it is merely waiting to see when it can say 'we told you we wouldn't like it' and formalise their own new party around Dr Owen; the other half can hardly wait to kiss them goodbye and start the new term. Whatever it brings, it can't be as bad as the last three suspicious and uncomradely months with the Owenites. Their negotiators have thus had a very free hand.

The only surprise about the letter from 37 prominent Liberal activists to the *Guardian* last week, stating their 'serious concern' about the negotiations, was that opposition surfaced so late. The Liberal Party has survived rather like an underground movement by allowing its constituent parts to function with considerable independence. Theirs is not a history of forming factions to win control of national policies and structures. Although LINk, the Liberal Information Network, and other Liberal activists did promote discussions on what principles should shape the new party, no group organised to push for their view.

As one Yorkshire activist said, he had assumed that having elected a satisfactory team of eight at Harrogate in September, including totem activist Tony Greaves, symbolic radical Michael Meadowcroft and party strongman Des Wilson, they could rely on them as their team; they would stride to the negotiating table with a clear plan of action in one hand, a briefcase of non-negotiable Liberal principles in the other and the spirit alive in their heart. Only when the council met at York on 21 November did they realise *Realpolitik* can outwit all that.

They had not reckoned with the influence of the unelected tier of negotiators including the clear-minded General Secretary Andy Ellis with a commitment to merger hardened by the election campaign. Nor had they reckoned with the creative urge of four men with a blank sheet of paper and the command to write a preamble setting out timeless political principles. The existing Liberal preamble begins 'The Liberal Party exists to build a liberal society in which every citizen shall possess liberty, property and security, and none shall be enslaved by poverty, ignorance and conformity' and billows along in 500 similar words, bringing tears to the eyes of many members, or so they say.

Michael Meadowcroft and Tim Clement-Jones, Liberal Party chairman, produced a new version with David Marquand and John Grant of the SDP which brought tears of outrage to Liberals who felt their timeless principles had been bowdlerised for SDP-ish worldy goals, like staying in the EEC. Yet both David Marquand, who insists there was no conflict between the two sides, and Michael Meadowcroft were surprised and disappointed at the reaction to it. Creating a new party and staying loyal to the old one are incompatible aims.

Celtic opposition

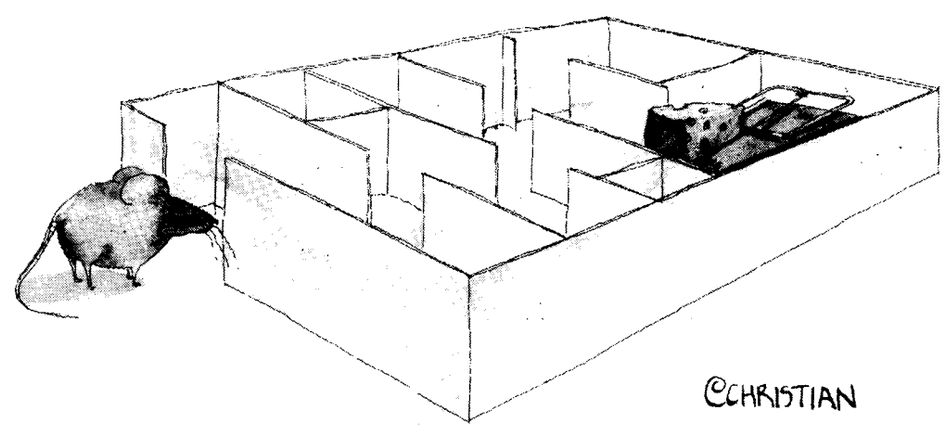
And nobody in England seems to have reckoned with the Scots. Though they have only two representatives, MP Sir Russell Johnston and Christopher Mason, they are fierce in their insistence on one limited objective: the Scottish Liberals must be seen to be a separate party. In this, they have the support of the Welsh. Apart from that, they are not too bothered about the principles underlying the new constitution, for neither the Scottish nor the Welsh Liberals belong to the streams of grassroots and radical Liberalism that flow so strongly in Yorkshire, Lancashire and London. If anything, those 'national' parties find themselves straining for firmer opposition to the left-wingery of Labour or Plaid Cymru in their Celtic strongholds.

The conflict this has created is over the federal constitution of the party and consequent principles of accountability and decentralisation. The existing shape of the Liberal Party owes nothing to political design and everything to the jumble of circumstance. Thus the Association of Liberal Councillors reflects the local council gains of the last 15 years, rather than any bit of refined Marxist thinking about 'organic cadres'. The Young Liberals owe their special role to the surge of activity that brought them to prominence in the '60s and '70s, though their energy has since dropped off. The Women's Liberal Federation owes its role to an older age when Liberal women were a nice, sturdy body which, having had little influx of feminism, they remain, if rather less sturdy than before. And the current powers of the Scots and Welsh are a tribute both to provincial independence and the renewed nationalism of the '70s. The voices have been created by the opportunities of the last 20 years rather than fealty to the wisdom of John Stuart Mill or even, as Mrs Thatcher would have it, the glories of the 19th century Liberal city fathers (sic). But Liberals are not dogmatic about history.

As the Scots and Welsh have managed to produce 10 of the party's 17 MPs, their voice is especially strong. It is they who have held out against a constitution giving equal status to Scotland, Wales and eight or nine English regions. That would make regional decentralisation a founding principle of the party. It would also enhance the status of English regions to the level which their constituents think is their due.

But it would demote the status of Scotland and Wales to that of an English region, a gift, argued the representatives, to the Scottish nationalists and Plaid Cymru. They convinced the undecided and last weekend they agreed to a nation-based federal structure. The new party would have three parts, Scotland, Wales and England, laying an extra tier over the English regions. As the peculiarity of the English is visible chiefly to outsiders it is not an identity the English regions feel comfortable with.

Last weekend the negotiators cut and stitched at the number of constituency delegates to the new party's annual assembly, hoping to forestall the threat of a united rebellion by grassroots activists fearful that they would not be able to be delegates and regional bigwigs baulking at having to answer to an English tier. The next Liberal council is on 19 December in Northampton. If a rebellious faction is to be formed, they will have to get the hang of factional activity quickly. □



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Baby David finally got his operation: will they now close the hole in the heart of the NHS?

Syndication International

A government health warning

NO PRIVATE organisation would dare to make the demands on its staff that the NHS does. The service is held together by the goodwill of those who work for it. The principle of universal free health care, however vestigial it has become in practice, is what makes trained nurses accept salaries of £6,250, junior hospital doctors put in 80-hour weeks, and consultants — most of them — work far more than their contracted hours. The fact that the system runs on altruism has shielded the government from the worst effects of its policies. Spending on the health service has not, on any realistic appraisal of the figures, kept pace with medical inflation and the demands of demography. As the former Conservative health minister, Sir Barney Hayhoe, showed in the Commons last week, the much-advertised 31 per cent increase 'in real terms' in health spending went mostly on pay increases which had been recommended before the Tories ever came to power. In 1960, Britain was the fifth highest spender in the world on health care, in terms of the proportion of GDP it devoted. Now it is fourteenth, behind the United States, Sweden, France, Netherlands, Germany, Ireland, Switzerland, Italy, Denmark, Finland, Austria, Norway, Japan and Belgium. In money terms, we spend half *as much per head as the French, and a* quarter *as much as the Americans. A recent survey carried out by the National Association of Health Authorities and the* Health Services Journal *showed that 72 per cent of people thought the amount spent on the NHS is too low (compared with 67 per cent a year previously), and 67 per cent thought the extra money should come from higher taxes or more government spending (compared with 60 per cent a year before). The fact that nine out of ten people treated on the NHS are satisfied with the experience can only be interpreted as a tribute to the dedication of the staff. The government has been happy to lean heavily on that goodwill — and abuse it at the same time. It has, for example, cited the 'buoyant labour market' as a reason for keeping nurses inadequately paid — a policy which less market-oriented people might regard as exploiting their sense of vocation. That policy is now backfiring, as nurses drain out of the profession with heart-rending consequences — but still the government seeks to cut their pay through abolishing special payments.*

What is daily more clear is that health workers' patience with the Thatcherite ethos is coming to an end. Even the doctors have been markedly more militant as the deficiencies of the system as a whole begin to bite on their own specialities. In the following pages, a GP, nurse and junior hospital doctors describe from their own points of view the growing crisis in their service; and we examine the ability of the doctors — traditionally a powerful pressure group — to save the system. Our view is that they can't, and won't. The nurses — who are readier to work collectively for change — almost certainly can, but only if they are willing to go on strike. So where does that leave us? ●

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White wash paper

GP* DAVID WIDGERY *responds to the white paper on general practice

FOR FIVE years everyone involved in primary health care has been waiting for the white paper — the first systematic review of general practice for 40 years and the last of this century. Further postponed by tempest and John Moore's (privately treated) pneumonia, its final arrival is a resounding anti-climax.

Most eye catching is the short-sighted removal of free eye testing by opticians. Apart from their other virtues, these tests provide the basis for national screening for the early detection of glaucoma, a major, preventable cause of blindness.

The general drift of the document and its philosophy for the improvement of general practice is equally depressing. Where there are laudable ideas, they are largely old chestnuts which should have been introduced years ago (like retirement at 70 for GPs . . . why not 65?) or part of an administrative process already underway. A good deal of lip service is paid to the virtues of preventive medicine. Although the prospect of more dietary asides from Edwina Curry astride an expensive exercise bicycle is appalling, it must be recognised that this emphasis picks up on decades of argument from medical and political progressives and, in the case of cervical screening, active campaigning by the women's movement.

But for an inner-city GP like myself, endlessly improvising ill-financed improvements while the hospital service reels under cuts and staff vote with their feet, there is little in the way of specific encouragement in the white paper. Certainly, compared with the mid-sixties reforms around the GPs Charter, it is a wasted opportunity.

For the inner-urban GP, the problems are clear cut and well documented. The service is now more heavily used, with both consultation rates and house calls up. This is becoming more pronounced as the bankrupted hospitals seek to decant outpatients and their medication, while discharging inpatients into something called 'the community'. The effects of prolonged mass unemployment, poverty and deteriorating public housing make the medical problems more difficult and intractable as well as more numerous.

The challenges for inner city medicine — young, single mothers, recent migrants, mobile patients and the raised incidence of psychiatric problems — mean a steady stream of crisis work which thwarts the systematic, doctor-initiated health education we all want to practice. Certainly, since the demise of the GLC and the collapse of the Labour-led councils' anti-cuts stand, the social and community services with which good primary care needs to be allied are themselves in crisis. The workload of urban general practice is expanding by default: like the London underground, more people make use of us not because of our intrinsic merits, but because everything else is packing up.

So when one is called out at 3am to put a demented old lady to bed, or traipse up back stairs strewn with faeces and graffiti to reassure an anxious, isolated mother, one can always 'comfort' oneself with the knowledge that it is all part of a larger social crisis in which medicine itself is a minor factor.

Inner-city GPs are not short of ideas: many were aired in the discussion of the Green Paper and the preceding, largely unimplemented, Acheson report. We think shorter, not longer, lists are essential, and that the primary care team, properly staffed and housed, is the only way to deliver continuing multi-disciplinary care in which the doctor is not always the key figure.

Bitter experience

We understand the importance of screening only too well. But we know from bitter experience how much harder it is to achieve high rates of immunisation, cervical cytology and cardio-vascular risk assessment in the turmoil of the inner city than in, say, Oxford, where the use of health promotion nurses was pioneered. Satisfactorily explaining the point of a smear test and performing it for a non-English speaking Bengali mother, who probably has her kids with her, simply needs more time and resources (including a translator and probably a female doctor). It is significantly harder for a health visitor to get the lumpen-proletarians of Limehouse to take up their measles jabs than it would be in leafy Surrey.

We know from the experience in Site Hill, Edinburgh, that ante-natal care based in a properly organised general practice achieves earlier and more convenient booking and better outcomes. But that needs attached community midwives, consultant support and premises capable of holding them in comfort. Practice-based immunisation and child development surveillance improves both uptake of vaccine and early detection of problems, especially deafness. It is probable that long-term medical problems like diabetes, hypertension and asthma can be managed better in GP clinics than by endless hospital outpatient waits, with a different doctor each time. But setting up these facilities needs more space and more clerical and reception staff. Instead most of us still practice in shoe-boxes.

Reforms which would have brought resources to the areas of greatest stress include the long overdue inner-urban weighting, a registration payment (which would also help other GPs with high patient turnover, as in retirement areas), the extension of fees and funding for doctors undertaking their own out-of-hours visits, a dramatic revision of the present building allowances commensurate with current costs and funding for computers for patient screening.

What would lend weight to the lip service paid to screening would be some understanding of how anticipatory care, using routine patient contact for case finding and risk discrimination, can be used systematically to reduce ill health in populations. This needs, as has been shown in Finland, to work hand in hand with 'primary prevention', that is, a sustained national food and pricing policy and consistent health education.

Instead we get the usual grocer shop mentality, the language not of populations and social classes, but of consumers and rival professionals. Indeed, there is an element of pre-'66 in the increased freedom to chop and change doctors and in the bonuses to be paid to GPs who can offer extra services. The theory is that of the marketplace, where 'good' doctors will drive out 'bad'.

These bonuses, like the 'Good Practice Allowance' pioneered by the Royal College of General Practitioners and rightly rejected by the profession, would buy the silence of the advanced sectors of the profession (by putting money into individual pockets rather than resources) and leave 'bad' doctors unscathed, except for slightly lower incomes. Doctor hopping doesn't even work since 'good' practices are invariably forced to restrict their lists by geographical zonings, so there will be an illusory freedom for a patient, with no real rights.

In the process, we move still further away from a national system to two or three-tier provision according to social geography. Yet again those with greatest need for good primary care will be served by poorer doctors, unable to afford more staff, practising in hopeless premises with bare minimum standards. And lurking behind the whole white paper is the intention to extend 'cost limits' to primary care. In comparison with the severely squeezed hospitals, spending on primary care has continued to increase, partly because GPs are already half-privatised and in independent contract with the NHS. The medium-term aim is to put a stop to that, too.

Perhaps one should not be too pessimistic. There are parts of this document which read like the views of the pioneering few in the sixties. Some suggestions for greater information and accountability, although modest, are long overdue (the Tories are always harder on GPs than Labour ever dares to be). But the spectre of the GP as rationer rather than spender of resources is now on the table — in a Britain of hospital services in acute crisis and health spending that is too low. This is bad news, despite the possibly enhanced sales of exercise bikes. □

David Widgery is a GP in the East End of London.

Contd on p.18

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'Lady Mouse in Mobcap' from *The Tailor of Gloucester,* The Tate Gallery. © Frederick Warne & Co., 1903

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Angel opts out

JANE DIBBLIN *in conversation with a nurse who can't give — or take — any more*

A YEAR AGO I left my job as a teacher to train as a nurse. I was 28, and was going into it with my eyes open; I'd thought about the pay and how I would manage, I wanted to do it because I'd long been interested in health care, I'm committed to the NHS, to the idea of quality health care for everyone.

Last week I wrote my letter of resignation. I'd thought I had no illusions, but I could not believe the conditions in the NHS. I think I offer the job a lot and have a great deal of relevant experience; so I feel very angry that I'm forced to leave for my own physical, emotional and social survival.

It is deeply frustrating to know that due to staff shortages we simply can't give people anything but the most basic nursing care. The shortages are caused not only by the cut-backs in the number of nurses allocated to deal with patients, but because not enough nurses are training and too many are leaving. The health authority which I work in is constantly short of between 100 and 200 nurses.

All we can do is ensure that people are not too uncomfortable. There is no opportunity to talk to distressed patients, those who are devastated by news about their health. You know that the best care you could give is time for them to ask questions and talk. Time is just what we don't have, and anyway we are generally too exhausted to give to anyone in that way. Knowing that people need so much more and that we can't even sit and hold the hand of a terminally ill patient takes a huge emotional toll on nurses.

All the other staff shortages in the NHS affect us. The pressure on nurses is cumulative as we have the most direct contact with patients. We have to support them while they are waiting for porters; soften the impact of overstretched doctors who don't explain things properly; and clean up because there aren't enough domestic staff.

Demoralisation

The material conditions are demoralising. On the fourth floor of my hospital the leaking roof hasn't been fixed and we have to wheel the trolleys round buckets. The lack of everyday necessities is very stressful: not having enough sheets and having to use two draw sheets — half-sheets — so patients sleep on a join; having to put drips on the curtain rails because there aren't enough drip stands; having to ask patients to wait because we only have two or three commodes on the ward and they're in use — that's very distressing for them as they may end up wetting the bed. I worked on one ward where there weren't enough teaspoons or egg cups, so patients had to wait until someone else had finished eating and we'd washed theirs — meanwhile breakfast had gone cold.

The policy now is that you can't offer visitors tea or coffee except in exceptional circumstances. There's no small teapot on the ward and no tea bags, only a huge pot and loose tea — so if you want to offer an upset relative a quick cup of tea it's virtually impossible. Small things perhaps, but ones which in the end undermine us.

The under-resourcing affects staff conditions as well as those of patients. There are no showers for nurses who don't live in; you're bound to get secretions and excretions on you during a shift — it doesn't seem too much to ask to be able to wash off properly before getting on the the bus for home. Even the tiny staff room where we take our breaks is also the sister's office, the same room where doctors and the charge nurse take relatives to talk in private.

Exhaustion is a major problem. We work shifts — you will frequently do a late, arriving home at 11 or 11.30pm, then do an early and have to be out of the house by 6.30 or 7am. We often work seven, eight or nine days in a row; by the seventh day, as most nurses will tell you, you're cutting corners, because you are simply too exhausted to do the work properly.

It's also heavy work and is getting more so. The drive to have people in hospital only for a very short time means that the proportion of seriously ill people on the ward is much higher. They need lifting and constant attention; meaning heavier work and more stress. I've heard that the life expectancy of a nurse has been calculated as only one year more than a miner — that's shocking, but not surprising.

I get one weekend off in four; when most people are having a social life I am working or too tired to go out and see friends. It leaves you no time to yourself and you can't even make arrangements a fortnight in advance because you don't know what your shifts will be.

And yet that kind of social support is essential because of the emotional wear and tear of the job, which is not recognised or taken into account in the NHS. People you're nursing will die, you have to expect that, but you don't have time to explore the way their care went or talk about your feelings with other staff. Nurses need counselling back-up; if we weren't so short-staffed you could have day release, short courses or take people out of the ward for a few hours.

Basic pay

Along with conditions and staff shortages, pay is the other major factor in nurses losing heart. I was aware of the terrible pay, but you only really understand what it's like when you have to live on it. My basic pay as a student nurse is £300 a month, with a little bit extra for nights and weekends — maybe £360 a month. I had to look for a place with cheap rent but I couldn't find anything nearby, so I decided to keep my car — without it I have to allow one and a half hours either end, plus contend with the dangers of coming home so late at night and leaving the house at 6.30am. But after running the mini, paying rent and bills and feeding myself I have no money for anything else. I can't buy a winter coat or go on holiday. I have to think twice about buying a book or going to visit friends. I can't allow myself any luxuries.

Clearly, some of these basic problems have existed for a long time; but the cuts have exacerbated them. Other aspects of the job which need changing are more complex: the hierarchy in the NHS, which results in student nurses being given tremendous responsibility one day and treated like idiots by consultants the next; the stereotypical image of nurses which leads to a lot of sexual harassment.

There are many excellent nurses who are willing to give of their best in a difficult job and are given no reward, whether in pay or recognition. As the drain of nurses leaving gains momentum, it seems there is still a refusal to tackle the sources of our demoralisation. □

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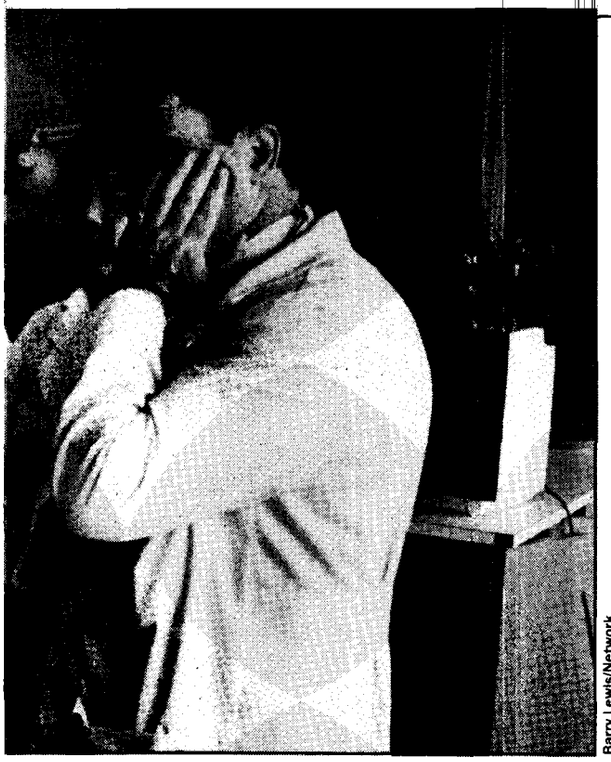

Barry Lewis/Network

Something to be worried about: doctors make the rounds

102-hour working week

YVONNE ROBERTS ***reports on the exhaustion of junior doctors***

AT 2 AM on Sunday morning, having dined on a Chinese takeway and conducted three forceps deliveries, Zoe Penn considered herself lucky enough to have an early night. A registrar in obstetrics and gynaecology at Westminster hospital in London, she qualified as a doctor four years ago. Now, as one of the country's 25,000 junior hospital doctors, she is paid less in overtime performing Caesarians than a paper boy receives an hour — and the job is considerably more anti-social.

Last Sunday saw the end of her eleventh day of consecutive work; she had been on call in the hospital since 9 am on Saturday morning and she still faced another 36 hours on duty. It's fortunate, Zoe Penn says, that she has no children. On the previous weekend, she had had 6 hours' rest in 57. She had spent the whole of one day operating continuously and she had had to think and act quickly to save a life.

A woman had been admitted with an ectopic pregnancy which is one of the very few true surgical emergencies. The baby develops in the Fallopian tube instead of the womb, the tube bursts, the baby dies and, unless there is a rapid diagnosis and surgery within a matter of minutes, the mother dies too.

Zoe Penn is 28 and wants to be a consultant but the surplus of junior doctors and the small numbers of consultant posts mean that her career prospects are poor. She will probably be 35 or 36 before she fulfils her ambition and more and more junior doctors are simply not prepared to wait that long. She also wants to hang on to certain standards in the treatment of patients but she, like thousands of other junior doctors, knows that the enforced insomnia which goes with the job acts like acid on these ideals. 'You listen to yourself talking to a patient at 3 am and you think "Can this be me? God, what a bitch . . ." It's because you're crying out for sleep. But if you're not careful that response then becomes a habit which is hard to break.'

Publicity has reached parts of the NHS which it normally doesn't reach in the past two weeks, but junior hospital doctors, this time around, have remained in the shade. Their particular 'crisis' is so institutionalised that, paradoxically, it has become part of the NHS's 'good practice'. The junior hospital doctors' situation is particularly interesting because it encapsulates a lot of what is wrong with the NHS and which will remain wrong under this government, even with an increase in spending, because it involves the politics of medicine, not just its accounts.

The system of junior hospital doctors is supposed to have a threefold purpose: a service to patients, a pattern of training and an opportunity for research. Extraordinarily long hours (the average is an 86-hour week), poor career prospects and salary which means overtime is paid at one-third the normal rate (£5 to £9 for four hours' work) has even persuaded the *British Medical Journal* to show passion. 'On these terms,' wrote one contributor this month, 'the NHS is not safe in anybody's hands.'

New proposals were announced last month to improve the hospital career structure but the issue of hours and pay remains unresolved. And the reasons why are not just financial. 'If we had a real cutback in hours,' says Dr Rob Hughes, national coordinator of the Medical Practitioners Union, the doctors' union, 'it would demystify the role of consultant, it would enable nurses and technicians to play a fuller role and it would encourage much more of a team attitude in hospitals instead of the present system of professional fagging with each consultant heading his own small pyramid of junior doctors.'

'Pilots have hours limits'

'Junior hospital doctor' is a term which covers the inexperienced and experienced, 'trainees' up to their late 30s. It involves four grades ending with senior registrar. In World War II the hospital work pattern was arranged in a system of rotas — and that's the way, illogically, it has remained since. A one-in-two rota means that in addition to a normal day, a doctor is on call in hospital one night in two and one weekend in two. It can mean a 102-hour week or more. Even a one-in-three rota may involve a 90-hour week.

'Lorry drivers and pilots operate with restrictions on the hours they work,' says Richard Sills, a junior doctor near Brighton. 'It seems extraordinary to me that doctors don't.'

They don't, of course, because it's the cheapest way to run the health service — or it used to be. A recent survey by the Hospital Consultants' and Specialists' Association reported that over half the health authorities in the country are having difficulty recruiting junior hospital doctors into a wide range of specialties. The net result for the patient is cancelled clinics and operations. In the past, foreign doctors filled in the gaps. Now that their use is restricted, health authorities are forced to hire locums.

In 1981, the Social Services select committee of MPs produced the Short Report which recommended more involvement by consultants with their patients and a cut in the hours of junior doctors as 'a matter of urgency'. Five years later, the DHSS issued a circular banning the one-in-two rota, advocating the one-in-three rota and recommending a maximum working week of a staggering 87 hours. Earlier this year, returns to the Pay Review Body for Doctors and Dentists showed that 2,500 to 3,000 doctors were working between 102 and 112 hours a week.

'Some consultants have worried that changes would mean they would be first on call,' says Dr Dallas Brodie, chair of the BMA's junior hospital doctors' committee. 'While the health authorities were convinced we were trying to screw them for every penny they had.' Both fears, he says, are misplaced. Change could come with more centralisation of hospitals and by consultants' forfeiting their 'entourages'.

Two years ago, the Medical Practitioners Union began its campaign for shorter hours and earlier this year the BMA followed suit. A resolution passed at this year's hospital junior staff conference says that if nothing is done to improve hours of work by next March, then there should be a demand for legislation to make excessive hours of work illegal.

The BMA's long-term aim is a 72-hour week. Rob Hughes of the MPU would prefer a 60-hour week enforced by law. It would mean an end to rotas and more flexibility, it could also act as the catalyst which would make hospitals much less the fiefdoms of consultants. 'And it would give us a base to fight for the NHS as a whole.' ▷

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The Bath area has 122 junior doctors who work an average of 86 hours a week. Ruth Gilbert, a local registrar in paediatrics, recently produced a plan which reduced those hours to under 72. The plan involved a minimal adjustment to working patterns and it would have saved money spent on locums. A fortnight ago, her colleagues, half of them consultants, rejected her plan. 'Doctors are innately conservative,' she says. 'There is a feeling that if they've gone through the system, then why shouldn't others. But if we all have that attitude how can things ever change?' □

Doctors to the rescue?

JOLYON JENKINS ***considers the BMA's role in fighting NHS cuts***

THE DOCTORS are in militant mood. Leading cardiologists and surgeons have written directly to the prime minister, saying they are being forced to work at 20 to 40 per cent below capacity because of the shortage of specialist intensive care nurses. Coming directly after the Birmingham hole-in-the-heart baby episode, it's clear that they know a political window of opportunity when they see it.

Will it be the doctors who rescue the NHS? Probably not: the political muscle of the British Medical Association (BMA) is not organised to push in the right direction, and is too often used in a fragmented and unco-ordinated way. 'Its supposed power is largely a matter of hype,' says Steve Iliffe, a London doctor and editor of the journal *Medicine in Society*. 'Governments don't want to upset doctors partly because of an irrational fear that one day they may wake up and find them gone.'

There *are* strong historical antecedents for a schema of consultants and the BMA using their political power to coerce health ministers into organising the health service their way. Most famously, Bevan was forced to 'stuff their mouths with gold', and Barbara Castle spent most of 1974-75 tussling with the BMA as she tried to negotiate over pay beds, consultants' contracts, and the financing of the NHS.

'How am I going to cope with that bunch of mavericks?' she asked her diary in July 1974. They were to be the bane of her life for the next two years. After one particularly trying meeting she recorded: 'They were streaming through the door, a dozen strong . . . grim and threatening. There was no doubting Grabham's [one of the negotiators] mood of barely restrained viciousness.' At a later meeting it was the same story: 'In they trooped, about one dozen strong. Lewin [chairman of the BMA council] as tight-faced as ever, Stevensen [BMA secretary] as touchy and truculent.' She once missed a banquet and had to eat sandwiches instead because the BMA were tied up in internal discussions. 'We chewed our way through some dry bits while the BMA, godlike, took their time.'

But the Castle precedent isn't particularly encouraging: in 1974, the consultants believed that their interests were directly under threat. Presented with a set of apparently non-negotiable demands, they reacted accordingly. Defending the interests of the NHS against a slow war of attrition is a different matter. Although consultants are manifestly able to mount effective campaigns to defend their own specialties and patches, the broader issues of the kind of health service we ought to have don't get addressed. The politics of fighting one's own corner leaves many corners undefended — geriatrics, for example.

The BMA *does* see part of its role as being to fight on fronts broader than simply doctors' pay and conditions. 'We have lobbied very hard on NHS funding,' says the BMA press office defensively, pointing to a list of strongly-worded conference resolutions, and it may be that without such pressure things would have been even worse. Yet the BMA has never stood on picket lines, and isn't about to: it relies on informal old boy networks, and the fact that it still has a *de facto* right of direct access to the Prime Minister, even if she doesn't listen to them.

Unlike in the Castle era, today's policies don't antagonise the BMA directly. Parts of the modern Tory psyche still defer to professionalism and expertise. Health ministers haven't yet dared confront the BMA head on; they've picked their battles carefully, over peripheral issues like GPs' deputising services and limited list prescribing.

> ***'The BMA is still a very conservative body. Its particularist interests have been in preserving medical care rather than health services, and health services rather than health. With these long-standing priorities, it's not surprising it hasn't mounted a radical challenge to this government'***

Even last week's white paper on primary health care, produced under John Moore's supposedly radical auspices, contains little the BMA will want to argue with.

Short shrift

But according to Dr Steve Watkins, a BMA council member and author of *Medicine and Labour* (Lawrence & Wishart), the deference only goes so far. 'The government is still prepared to listen to the BMA on issues where it hasn't made up its own mind. When it knows what it wants to do, the BMA can be ignored, just as all other interest groups are ignored these days,' he says. Pleas for more money to be spent on the NHS as a whole get short shrift.

One effect of this uncertain mixture of forelock-tugging and disdain has been, according to some commentators, an increased radicalism in the BMA. There's some evidence to back this view. There was certainly a real shift to the left in 1977, when the more radical Medical Practitioners' Union decided to work within the BMA rather than standing apart from it.

In 1983 the Association attacked the government's civil defence plans, voted for the extension of abortion rights to Northern Ireland, and fought the Police and Criminal Evidence Bill. This year, a forthright report on the links between deprivation and health was published despite — or perhaps because of — lobbying by the Conservative Medical Society for it to be suppressed in the run-up to the election. The BMA also held a fringe meeting at the TUC conference together with other NHS trades unions — the first time it has publicly made common cause with them.

But the BMA is in fact still a very conservative body. The apparent radicalism is mainly a symptom of the national shift to the right. It has always wanted more *money* for the NHS — so long as it has been on its terms. Its fiercest battles with governments have been over attempts to change the *structure* of the service. Its particularist interests have been in preserving medical care rather than health services, and health services rather than health. With these long-standing priorities, it's not surprising it hasn't mounted a radical challenge to this government.

It's not just a question of the BMA's attitude, but of the whole ethos of doctorhood. Doctors are still drawn from a narrow stratum of society. This seems to be firmly built into the way medical students are accepted. Last year, Dr Joe Collier at St George's Hospital Medical School discovered that a computer programme used to select candidates for interview discriminated on the grounds of race and sex. The programme was supposed to model the decisions of the select committee which, before 1981, had chosen the candidates. Evidently it modelled them only too well.

The career structure is fiercely competitive: everyone is forced to climb an increasingly narrow ladder until they reach the top or fall off into general practice. The potential for change which junior doctors ought to represent is dissipated by the relentless pressures to conform.

This isn't a system which can easily accommodate a politics of co-operation or solidarity. Instead it fosters a heroic, 'can do' mentality, where the show must go on. Consultants at St Thomas's hospital in London have taken voluntary pay cuts so that a few more beds can stay open. Admirable in some ways, a public signal of distress: but about as radical as suet pudding. Such gestures, borne of doctors' self-image as superheroes, could be counterproductive in the long run. Don't pin your hopes on this bunch of mavericks. □

NEW STATESMAN INDEX

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WHAT NOW PRIME MINISTER?

THE MARGARET THATCHER INTERVIEW

The Prime Minister has granted her first major television interview since the election. After the summit, after the crash, she talks to Jonathan Dimbleby about the events of 1987 – and her hopes for the New Year.

IT'S A THIS WEEK

THAMES

EXCLUSIVE THURSDAY DECEMBER 10 AT 8.30pm ON ITV

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Specialists in revolt

'Change the world' (Marx); 'Change life' (Rimbaud). The poet André Breton, magus of surrealism, died in 1966, two years before his twin aspirations seemed briefly to become reality on the streets of Paris. Surrealism — so often seen as merely an art movement extinguished by WWII — contributed more than slogans to May '68. Its interventions against Stalinism and colonialism, its manifestos and provocations, were among the few signs of life in postwar France. **PAUL HAMMOND** ***talks to*** **JEAN SCHUSTER,** ***once Breton's right-hand man, now surrealism's archivist, about the forgotten history of permanent revolution***

Mothers' Day poster 'altered' by surrealists Guy Dumayron and Bernard Roger

THERE IS A PHOTO in a book of some men and a woman in a Paris café in 1956. It is the Surrealist Group. Foregrounded by the flashgun, backs to the rest of the fraternity, are three figures. To the right of André Breton sits Elisa, his wife; to Breton's left a dapper young man half his age, Jean Schuster. It seems they are sharing a private joke, keeping it in the family.

Rallying to a renascent surrealism soon after Breton's return from wartime exile in America, Jean Schuster quickly established himself as the lynchpin's favourite son. It's been said that the movement's authentic history resides in its revues. Poet, logician, *révolté*, Schuster was pivotal to all the surrealist periodicals of the 1950s and '60s. And he was instrumental in the alliances between surrealism and various oppositional groups — anarchists and communists — during this era, culminating in 1960 in the incendiary 'Declaration Concerning the Right of Insubordination in the Algerian War', the famous 'Manifesto of the 121'. At Breton's death, Schuster picked up the pieces and relaunched collective activity. Three years later, and not without a fight, he orchestrated the auto-dissolution of the French group.

Today Jean Schuster is the director of ACTUAL, an association whose objective is the creation, in Paris, of a documentation centre on surrealism. (Among the founding sponsors are Blanchot, Césaire, Duras, Paz). Recently he was in London to earmark archives of interest. It was with some trepidation that I anticipated interviewing a man once described as the Saint Just *and* Diderot of surrealism. On first impression there was little hint of choler in this smiling savant — indeed, he even confessed to a liking for the films of Peter Greenaway — but the toughness was there alright.

Paul Hammond: The usual idea people have of postwar surrealism is of an adventure that had run its course, wallowing in apolitical mysticism.

Jean Schuster: Obviously this is a grotesque and mendacious accusation. The Paris of 1946 to which André Breton returned was, intellectually speaking, in the hands of the Stalinists, formidably organised by the Louis Aragon-Elsa Triolet duo. Sartre made the pretence of being frightened by all this but he only had one desire, to enter into dialogue with the Communists, and for him this persisted until 1956. Surrealism, Breton . . . you had to eliminate such 'idealists'. A man who should have been predisposed against this manoeuvre, Maurice Nadeau, helped it along its way by publishing a brash *History of Surrealism* whose twin effect was to galvanise young people through his anecdotal account of the movement's 'heroic' period, and to demoralise them by drawing up, on his own authority, surrealism's death certificate. This was to serve the purpose of Aragon, and of Sartre. What made Nadeau do it nobody knows. Doubtless he'd been influenced by his great friends Pierre Naville and Raymond Queneau, who possessed a hatred for surrealism and Breton that went back twenty years.

To return to the charge of idealism and apoliticism. All you need do is consult the texts. The first three tracts published after Breton's return are 'Liberty is a Vietnamese word', whose title says it all; 'Inaugural Break', which denounces the French CP as traitor to the revolution and reaffirms surrealism's revolutionary will; and 'Back to the kennel, whelps of God', which reaffirms surrealist atheism against Christian attempts to misappropriate it. Naturally these texts from 1947-48 are concise, clear and irrefutable and for this reason they were stifled, treated as if they were non-existent. You mustn't forget that surrealism — and this is its destiny and its grandeur — is *marginal*. Its voice cannot be amplified by the media; the opposite in fact. You don't compete with vociferous Stalinism and Sartrean complacency, obligingly echoed in all the papers, by publishing tracts the press maintains a strict silence about. And Nadeau, who at *Combat* had a prestigious and efficacious platform, wasn't about to allow the surrealists to demonstrate the inconsistency of his *History*.

Breton, it's true, was fascinated by esotericism.

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But this wasn't new. Clairvoyance, astrology, alchemy, parapsychology were already permanent attractions: in 1925 the surrealists, Breton in the lead, regularly consulted Madame Sacco, a clairvoyant. The last pages of the *Second Manifesto* are a vibrant appeal to the alchemical tradition. So who is being ridiculed here? As usual the more a lie is repeated, the louder it is shouted, the greater the chances of it becoming true. Everybody knows perfectly well that at surrealism's origins was a quest for what I will call a 'meta-reason' — the need to draw on the most secret wellsprings of thought to disengage a new logic founded on the ruins of rationalism. Consequently those folk who profess to discover Breton's sudden infatuation with esotericism after *Arcane 17*, published in 1945, are ignorant and malicious to boot. Secondly, an interest in occult sciences doesn't mean you subscribe to their doctrines. You can perfectly well have a passion for the functioning of magical thought processes without thereby adopting the beliefs that underpin them. Likewise admiring the admirable Pascal or the admirable Saint Pol-Roux, as the surrealists did from the very start, does not in the least imply any obligation to prostrate oneself with them before their christ.

And lastly, and this follows from the above, Breton's political passion never left him. Let us recall, for those who don't know, that the 'Manifesto of the 121', which had such an international impact in 1960, was conceived and edited by Maurice Blanchot, Dionys Mascolo, Breton and myself. Sartre had only to sign this text for the whole world to imagine he'd thought it up. Let's remember too that from 1951 to 1953 the surrealists regularly collaborated with *Le Libertaire*, the Anarchist Federation's paper: not especially apolitical, I'd have thought. Finally, of 47 collective declarations published between 1947 and 1966, 26 have specifically political content.

PH: There was this external opposition, but one can also speak of opposition from within. I'm thinking of Belgian surrealists like Magritte who were close to the Stalinists in 1946, the *Surréalisme Révolutionnaire* group, and *Cobra*.

JS: You'll recall that the time Magritte was closest to Stalinism was when his painting was at its most mediocre, the period he dubbed 'in full sunlight'. The so-called Revolutionary Surrealism group, encouraged by Magritte and Nougé, were convinced they could further their cause within the framework of the PCF. Given their authentic struggle for surrealism during the German occupation it is hard today to censure such naivety. Tzara, who seemed to them less compromised and compromising than Eluard and Aragon, was quick to disappoint. With *Cobra*, politics weren't in the foreground. Here was an especially interesting experiment: to the extent that its Belgian component was very important and its activity based on automatism, *Cobra* was *in essence* more opposed to Magritte and Nougé, for whom automatism was always a *bête noire*, than to Breton and his friends.

PH: You also made contact with the radical Lettrists who were later to form *L'Internationale situationniste*.

JS: In 1954 we contacted Guy Debord and his friends to plan a joint action in Charleville for the Rimbaud centenary. They tried to trap us by having us sign a text couched in the most wooden marxist jargon. This ended in a minor polemic.

PH: It's been said that the situationists stole the surrealists' thunder in May '68.

JS: This isn't altogether untrue. If you read their revue and Raoul Vaneigem's writings attentively you'll see that there isn't a single new idea in them, that everything is taken from the surrealists, starting with the references to Fourier. Vaneigem is an excellent writer - caustic, cultured, brilliant — but wholly without intellectual armature. He is, as Dalí might have said, a soft structure. He compiles the ideas of others by rearranging them with fashionable aplomb. Debord is a caricature of Marx, even as he caricatures himself and plays the pedantic philosopher, the reviser of Hegel and Feuerbach. His *The Society of the Spectacle* is, with Saint-Exupéry's *Citadelle*, the hollowest, most soporific book I've ever read.

The situationists spent a large part of their time heaping insults on our heads, especially in mocking our anti-colonial views, our confidence in the revolutionary potential of the Third World. If we were prey to certain illusions — and I admit this — what is there to say about those who insisted upon the revolutionary potential of the *French proletariat*!? For anybody who knows the French working class in this the second half of the 20th century it's enough to make you die from laughing (and sadness). In May 1968 Debord and his cronies put it about that 20,000 workers were ready to take to the streets of Paris and make the Revolution. If you didn't know the situationists you'd think this was humorous 'intoxication'. None of it. Debord and humour are as far apart as a cockroach and a dancer at the Crazy Horse Saloon. It was cretinism, pure and simple.

> ***'There is a red thread of surrealism which, given the blow of an axe, will appear anew. Who will give this blow, and when, I have no idea'***

PH: There's a 'Bretonophobia' endemic to Anglo-American letters. In Kleinian terms Bataille is the 'good object', Breton the 'bad'. Behind Bataille stands Nietzsche; then come Lyotard, Derrida, postmodernism.

JS: Firstly it must be said that the phobia you refer to is due in part to lack of knowledge. The translation of Breton's work is relatively recent, and *Les Vases communicants*, which I hold to be the most important text of Breton's and of surrealism, still hasn't been Englished. Actually, the hostility towards Breton isn't an English monopoly. In France, after Philippe Sollers and the various neo-Stalinists associated with *Tel Quel*, every literary pen-pusher feels obliged to vent his spleen against Breton. It is impossible for me to adequately address the Bataille-Breton opposition in this discussion. It exists, it is fundamental, but it must be considered dialectically, at the very least as something indispensably complementary to an understanding of the temper of that time. In brief, you could say that a common desire to accede to the sacred proceeded along different paths: in Bataille the path of sacrifice, with representations of mutilation, ritual murder; and in Breton via a cult of the marvellous, a provocative openness towards poetry, be it aided by objective chance, amorous passion or simply artistic emotion.

If surrealism existed today as an organised group, I think it would have to combat postmodernism — perhaps by ignoring it. Because postmodernism is an avant-garde like any other, with its perennial spirit of emulation, its desire to occupy the terrain and wave the very latest flag. Surrealism — and this is something people don't seem to understand, in England, France, or anywhere else — is an *epistemological break* with the avant-garde that spawned it — Dada — and with the very concept of an avant-garde.

PH: 1969 was a year of crisis for surrealism. Breton had died three years before. In your text 'The Fourth Canto' you announced the auto-dissolution of the group. You distinguished between 'eternal' and 'historic' surrealism. Can you explain?

JS: You remember Breton's enumeration in the *Manifesto*: 'Swift is surrealist in malice, Sade is surrealist in sadism, Chateaubriand is surrealist in exoticism', etc. This was his way of saying that surrealism existed before him, before the official birth of the movement in 1924, but also a way of saying that it was a basic component of the human mind; it began with the human mind and would end with it. Hence I'd not invented anything. 'Historical' surrealism has a beginning, the year 1924, and an end, the year 1969.

PH: How is historical surrealism related to eternal surrealism? Will historical surrealism reemerge?

JS: Goethe tells a story that much impressed Freud: every rope on a British ship was woven around a red thread, invisible to the eye; wherever you cut the rope you'd find the red thread, which proved it belonged to the Royal Navy. I believe there is a red thread of surrealism which, given the blow of an axe, will appear anew. Who will give this blow, and when, I have no idea. I believe the future movement will relate the fundamental principles of surrealism to the needs and contingencies of its own time. That is to say it will not call itself surrealist, because those needs and contingencies will be completely different.

PH: One would imagine that future 'surrealists' would recognise themselves, but how?

JS: The essential sign is a belief in the indestructible nature of the interior poetic voice, which extends from Orpheus to Jean-Pierre Duprey and Joyce Mansour. As for the rest, though far from negligible, I'm incapable of imagining them.

PH: Is ACTUAL's mission to historicise surrealism or to be a catalyst in its future activity?

JS: ACTUAL is the rope around the red thread, protecting it. Three months before his death Breton made me responsible for the surrealist archives in his possession. He thought, I presume, that though these documents were his property they belonged, given their collective character, to the surrealist collectivity. In my opinion it is vital to make an inventory of these archives, to bring together if not the original documents at least copies of them. This is the 'memory' of surrealism, which is neither wholly present in the books or the works of art. Without being in opposition to the books or art works these archives give both an extra dimension. Such surrealist traces belong to no other patrimony than that of the human heart and mind.

* * *

Sad to say the pickings in London were slim indeed: a letter of René Crevel's here; some correspondence from E.L.T. Mesens there. British surrealism, it seems, is an elusive bird. But, looking on the bright side, Jean Schuster and I agreed that, as Joseph Cornell knew, the empty perches of history are eloquent too. □

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ARTS

CINEMA

Let their people go

Judith Williamson

Cry Freedom (PG)
Empire Leicester Square

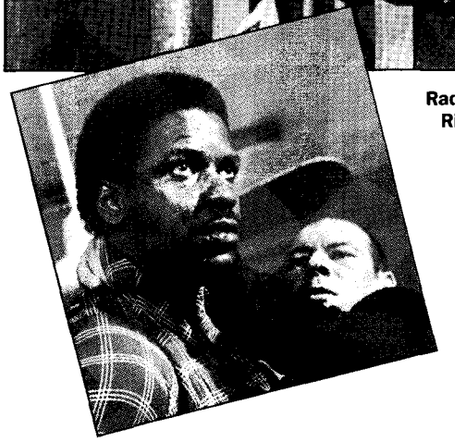
I HAVE USED a lot of space in this column criticising films which heroise white journalists, and my expectations of *Cry Freedom* were low. Yet I left the cinema as a movie-goer filled with righteous anger at the régime which tortured and killed Steve Biko and so many others; while at the same time, as a critic, pondering over this feeling and the devices which aroused it. For *Cry Freedom* is a powerful film; far more political than it needed to be (if it were just another journalist-in-danger movie), it is an impressive example both of the strengths of a liberal mainstream cinema, and of its limitations — and of the strange way in which these are bound up together.

The immediate context of the film is well known. Directed by Richard Attenborough, it tells the true story of Donald Woods, white South African newspaper editor whose attempts to expose the circumstances of Biko's death in detention led to his banning, followed by a dramatic escape with his family. Woods' book, *Biko*, smuggled out with him, had a wide-reaching effect in focusing attention on Biko's case and on the torture and murder carried out routinely by SA 'security' forces. The Woods have acted as advisors on the film, which in many respects goes out of its way to de-heroise them.

The Woods are not radicals: they have a black live-in maid and at the start of the film, Biko accurately calls Woods 'a white liberal who clings to all the advantages of the white world'.

But it is precisely this which allows the film its central persuasive device; the gradual exposure of Donald Woods' flawed liberal position and his education by Biko and by events which lead to a total undermining of his belief in SA 'justice'. The mechanism is exactly similar to that of *Missing*; a conservative view which may be that of a general audience is inscribed in the film in the form of a sympathetic character who is then confronted by a reality — representing the *film's* bottom-line political view — which forces him or her to change it. This is by no means a stupid way of challenging deeply held 'neutral' attitudes: *Missing*, for all its faults, took conscious aim at the dominant US ideology of the time. And *Cry Freedom*, especially in its first half, takes some pretty good swipes at the kind of ludicrously 'balanced' conservative-liberal position which contains the concept 'black racism'.

The part of the film in which these criticisms really come alive is where Woods first explores the world beyond white privilege and tests out his ideas on Biko and his friends. It is from their mouths that attacks on liberal hypocrisy work best, because they carry all the force of an utterly different experience. Surrounded by Biko's political buddies in a black settlement, Woods' comments on 'black racism' come across as laughable, and in one memorable scene where Woods anxiously tells them that he may be imprisoned for six months, they laugh and say it will do him good.



Radical black consciousness and white liberal conscience: Richard Attenborough with (inset) Denzel Washington as Steve Biko

Their criticisms come across sympathetically because the film has taken care to show from the outset the far more extreme dangers blacks are subject to all the time. The opening sequence is a violent raid on the Crossroads settlement: so by the time we first meet Woods, state brutality has already been established — itself presented, significantly, after first establishing the peacefulness of the camp just before the dawn raid. Thus the film's own bottom-line reality pre-endorses Biko's speech and comments and we eagerly anticipate the realignment of Woods' views in accordance with this reality.

The second half of the film provides, in a sense, a retrospective justification of his changed perceptions, because the dramatic chase and escape create a sense of danger (as in any thriller) and we start to feel the oppressiveness of the régime not through image and political argument, as in the sections where Biko is still alive, but through the different narrative device of suspense. When Woods is 'banned' (as Biko was, but with less dramatic impact) the film's devices shift into a different gear, that of the race-against-the-clock. Yet the film ends with a considered attempt to counterbalance the drama of the white family: at the moment of their greatest danger, flying unauthorised over SA airspace, it cuts to an extended sequence of the Soweto massacre and ends with a long list of all those killed in detention, Biko merely one among many, whose deaths are accounted for with imaginative explanations like 'fell against chair'.

This measured counter-weighting is not only part of the film's politics but of its *appeal*. For at heart it represents a kind of improved liberalism: if the story is in a way the white liberal's *bildungsroman*, the movie itself is its product. Donald Woods' flawed liberalism is exposed, not to be replaced by radicalism but to be made whole again. In a period of change, liberal ideology must let go certain positions — 'de-territorialise' — in order to re-form or 're-territorialise' in ways more appropriate to the times: a process Barry Curtis has likened to putting down a suitcase so as to get a firmer grip when you pick it up again. This is almost exactly what *Cry Freedom* does — which is

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why its first half is so genuinely powerful, representing as it does the undermining and letting go of a liberal racist position, and with its positive presentation of black leaders (Denzel Washington as Biko successfully conveys the enormous charm and personal charisma that Biko reputedly had).

This half of the film provokes a political anger, as indeed it should. But by the end, why am I feeling so righteous? Is it the immense narrative relief as Woods reaches a British Embassy and is offered a cup of tea? Is it perhaps the very fact that Britain is where Woods escaped to? Is it the certainty that the film is right, that *I* am right, that all right-minded people are right, in opposing apartheid? This feeling, to return to my original point, is simultaneously the strength and the weakness of the film: a strength, because of course apartheid *is* wrong and the more people convinced of it the better; a weakness, because in leaving a glow of indignation about South Africa, the film never undermines our ultimate faith in the fairness of its updated liberalism (it endorses only *non-violent* black struggle) and, by implication, our own traditions. Perhaps some day someone will make a big-budget mainstream film about police violence to blacks in *this* country. If that seems hard to imagine, it is interesting to consider why. □

TELEVISION

The greater cats

Hugo Williams

SUNDAYS ON TELEVISION are a kind of big game reserve nowadays, where animals of all kinds can escape the week-day pollution and put the case for conservation. Recent Sunday safaris have included programmes on tigers (two) on lions, grizzlies, bats, elephants, eagles and hedgehogs. In the latter, **Miniature Worlds** (BBC2), we learnt that 'worms are pretty squelchy'. Did Peter France do some practical field work to ascertain this?

There was a considerable overlap in the material on *Forest of Fear*, the film about the man-eating tigers of the Bengal 'Sundarbans' by Peter Jackson on **The Natural World** (BBC2), and the two programmes on the same subject by the Bedi brothers, **Saving the Tiger** (C4) which appeared a month later. At first I thought the Bedi film was a repeat, the shots and thoughts were so similar. But both were equally thrilling with their patient close-ups, gory case-histories and jittery natives wearing weird, spiked back-armour. Why are the Sundarbans tigers man-eaters? That 'they seem to have lost their shyness of humans' didn't really hit the spot, any more than the speculation that the salt water they drink might enrage them. A more likely cause is the encroachment of the villages, or even those *Save the Tiger* wallahs always trying to get in close for the obligatory shot of big cats on the job. This sequence is standard Sunday viewing. In fact, you usually get it more than once, as indeed do the lionesses and tigresses, constantly crouching down in readiness.

That the trunk of an elephant — **Lord of the Jungle** (C4) — is 'a highly sensitive, multi-purpose organ, a nose on a pole' I might have guessed, but not that they have musk glands on their foreheads which they activate by bending their tusks against trees. When a male elephant is 'in musk' he has a strong smell, red stuff on his cheeks and 'an added dominance'. The female now spreads her legs and urinates, 'permitting the male to inspect her reproductive state' (note the displaced flight into Latin). While one female is mounted, her companion stands by to see fair play, demurely powdering her back with dust, as she will at her friend's labour.

It is strangely pleasant to watch elephants strolling about on television or wallowing in mud and touching to watch them slowly lying down to sleep. However, I did think the commentary on this film, which was also by the Bedis, was inferior to anything on *The Natural World* and not always ahead of its auto-cue.

Attitudes to the various eagles and other birds of prey in *Battle for the Eagles* on **The Natural World** differ wildly throughout Europe. Groups of Swedish bird-watchers gather each year to see off their beloved honey buzzards from the southern tip of their country. They wave and wish them luck but, by the time the birds reach France and Italy, they run into an annual hunting holocaust from similar-looking beings with moustaches. It's surprising that their winter migrations don't lose their appeal. The film was constantly watchable, especially, as always, the rare shots of the rarer golden eagle, only one chick born in England this year.

Our animal Sunday contained two other related programmes to feed into all this field work. On **The Great Philosophers** (BBC2) there was hawklike rivalry between Bryan Magee and his guest J. P. Stern as to who could most succinctly encapsulate the thinking of their master Friederich Nietzsche. Although each tried to sweep aside all that was weak, mean and incompetent in the other's discourse, while simultaneously overcoming all that was cowardly and comfortable within themselves, I thought that both achieved some understanding of the other's weaknesses while allowing each other the particular knowledge he needed for his argument. A certain generosity of spirit was arrived at, but each was finally a law unto himself, as he should be. J. P. Stern had a slightly superior accent, so he probably came out on top. Or was it Magee who allowed him to? Nietzsche on telly was the ultimate irony. 'Rather than cope with the unbearable loneliness of God's death, men comfort themselves by seeking out the serpents that inhabit His garden.' I wonder when the recurrence is scheduled for.

Naturally Creative (C4), a consideration of Man as the 'creative animal', began in one of the paleolithic caves with some speculations about the origins of art. In those days 90 per cent of children died while being born, until evolution got the idea of expelling them from the womb while their skulls were still soft and we were landed with these helpless little creatures who can't get a grip on reality for about a year (and some of us, God knows, take even longer). Do you buy it? I did when I heard what followed. It seems that, in offering the breast, mothers dip what is real into babies' imaginations, so that they almost feel that they have created this world that nourishes them. 'Almost' may be the key word here, but anyone who has watched a baby in close communion with his bit of blanket will agree that it seems to be no more than an extension of some inner world. 'Art and culture,' went the film on cue, 'play a similar role. They mediate between the inner and physical world.' So long as we agree that 'art', 'mediate', 'inner' and 'physical' are all only metaphors, this seemed as valid as any other explanation for the inexplicable.

On to some birdsong — for some reason, always a dicey area for science. 'It's almost as if they do it for the sheer . . .' Poetry may be 'a form of brain failure' if it is 'confused with explanation', but the wren's miniature pipings are 'completely unanalysable in their complexity'. So there's hope for us yet.

MUSIC

Let it bleed

Jon Savage

A FEMALE VOICE begins, enunciating clearly into a cassette. 'Hello. I hate your *fucking* guts. *Fuck* you. I hate your *fucking* guts. I hate your *fucking* guts. I hate your *fucking* guts. I hate/I hate this *fucking* machine. I don't know how the *fuck* to use it. I hate your *fucking* guts. I'm going to make my own *fucking* music.' A group of musicians then launch into an enthusiastic, if incompetent, version of the Rolling Stones' 'Rocks Off'.

Pussy Galore's cassette of *Exile On Main St*, recorded in August 1986, comes in a line of punk *detournements* of 'Rock Classics'. The most

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recent examples — whether Culturcide or the Justified Ancients of MuMu — have been concerned with copyright and its effect on a hegemonic music/media industry, but, although their song-by-song reduplication of the original album is a copyright buster (1. because I'm sure they haven't asked for the relevant permissions and 2. because traces of the original disc float in and out of the mix), Pussy Galore are concerned with something quite different: the act of making music itself, and the politics of 'incompetence'.

Like many current oppositional projects, *Exile On Main St* comes from a fan's (or a pop historical) knowledge. The 1972 original, *Exile On Main Street* is monolithic as a 'classic' — number 3 in the recent *Rolling Stone* '100 Best Albums of the Last Twenty Years' — and is celebrated for its 'outsider' qualities: a series of strong songs about subjects like heroin and Angela Davis, given resonance and 'authenticity' by a murky production. Pussy Galore *know* all this, and on first hearing, their distorted, badly recorded cover versions seem like mere trashings of the Rolling Stones' symbolic importance — a reasonable point, but hardly enough to sustain 40 minutes worth of grunge.

Yet the expletives at the tape's head derive not so much from punk anger as from frustration and the basic drive to articulacy. What is exciting about *Exile on Main St* is not the fuck-you factor nor the opportunities for reference-spotting — two over-exercised commonplaces — but the insight that it gives into the impulse to make music — or, which is even more applicable to pop, mere sound.

Pussy Galore take up the gauntlet thrown down by the original's 'raw' production and push it to the limit. The dominant sound on the cassette is machine hum: there are cut-ins, oscillations, group arguments, tape hisses and out-of-tune instruments. Just when you think they've got a really 'good' version of a song, you realise that the original is playing quietly underneath. In some ways, this is a deadly serious version of the Comic Strip's old 'Bad News Tour' joke — 'The Stones took a year to record this: we did it in three days' — and a restatement of pop's possibilities: you can hear the players finding their power as they shape noise.

If Pussy Galore push parody into a celebration of the articulation process, Negativland are far more didactic: their parodies zero in on pop music as the cutting edge of a mindless, consumerist American hegemony. *Escape From Noise* (Recommended) is reminiscent of the heyday of the Firesign Theatre; an environment where parodies of selling techniques, cold war paranoias and current musical styles sit next to impassioned critiques. 'The first cut on the record is cross-formatted focused for airplay success', drools an oleaginous voice; after a list of rock stars — 'Michael Jackson, Bruce Springsteen, Van Halen, Tina Turner' — a voice yells: 'Rock music blares/Doors slam/People yell/Children scream/Sirens whine/Trucks rumble and roar/And rock music blares/Blares and blares. Is there any escape from noise?'

The result is as chilling as it is pessimistic: after a superb heavy rock parody — 'Christianity is stupid; communism is good' — Negativland wonder whether their escape from noise might not be achieved by a move to LA and a signing to a major record company. There is no escape from this stupidity, they appear to say, after defining it with merciless accuracy, and, of course, they are correct: the past eight to ten years have seen the 'avant-garde' throughout the arts become assimilated into the mainstream to the extent that they constitute merely a recce party for corporate capitalism. In pop, entryism has been the thing ever since the early '80s: in a cultural equivalent of power politics, success has too often been validation enough.

Indeed Pussy Galore and Negativland, in their separate ways, are signs of a growing awareness that entryism has failed: any 'message' is circumscribed by the medium and the means of production. Yet their parodies hit the brick wall of the way that pop works as a medium and a modern, central dilemma: power comes through *popularity*, and how do you achieve that and not lose your goals? How do you oppose the mainstream without, in referring to it, reinforcing its power? And how do you attain either popularity or power in a random, repressive climate? At present, both Pussy Galore and Negativland are a long way from either — the *Exile On Main St* cassette distributed in tiny numbers because of copyright problems, Negativland forced to elocate because of a studio fire — but their parodies, in 'rendering a certain *sublimity*', offer possible models for the future. □

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ART

Ghetto blast

James Hall

Incidents
TONY RICKABY *Pentonville Gallery, 4 Whitfield St, London W1*

THE RECENT DEATH on the London Underground of a boy who had performed the daredevil feat of climbing onto the track in order to spray graffiti brings many of the implications of Tony Rickaby's work into a sharper and more immediate focus.

Rickaby treats the surface of the canvas as a wall or ground over which he daubs and scratches graffiti-style designs and scribbles. Next to each work he places captions by sociologists, cultural analysts, as well as novelists and poets. One by Norman Mailer is especially apt:

> Graffiti is the expression of a ghetto which is near to the plague, for civilization is now inimical to the ghetto. Too huge are the obstacles to any natural development of a civilized man. In the ghetto it is almost impossible to find some quiet location for your identity. No, in the environment of the slum, the courage to display yourself is your only capital.

Graffiti becomes a testament to the death of the self, and defacing the fabric of one's own society an act of revenge on a state that has rendered its own citizens faceless and meaningless.

Incidents (these tend to be muggings, suicides and attacks) is based on Rickaby's experiences of South London — that of the bleak, derelict housing estates with their deserted and dangerous walkways. The victims are depicted in an insubstantial, fragile way — reduced to dark outlines that recall the contours traced round corpses by the forensic experts. Paradoxically, in the midst of modern life, this 'mark making' returns to the origin of art in cave paintings, where to 're-present' living things meant the capture of their soul, and thus to impose a death sentence.

However, *Incidents* is not just a nihilistic and voyeuristic record of inner-city deprivation and injustice. Rather than death-certificate art, it is epitaph art. Rickaby fills out and supplements these contour-corpses with rich, dense layers of colour that transform the 'incidental' nature of graffiti into something far more substantial and enduring. Mailer wrote of the near impossibility of ghetto-dwellers finding 'some quiet location' for their identity. Through the coherence and texture of his colour, Rickaby gives his work an elegaic 'quietness' of tone that belies, and transcends, the desperation of essentially statistical subject matter.

'Inner-City Flight' is a triptych made up of three canvases whose edges form a geometric grid like that of concrete slabs or paving stones. The right hand 'slab' is completely black. A contour-corpse is placed over the other two, which are daubed with rich blues, purples, browns and greens. An inscription of a rather strained eloquence is traced over the top of the central slab in elegantly romantic hand-writing: 'All the grey rectangles are beneath me. Mechanically I pick away at the

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Paving stones on the road to hell: Tony Rickaby's 'Inner-City Flight'

plaster. Modernisation or decay? My stomach aches from fear of flying. The future flies suddenly by.'

This is more than just a meditation on suicide. With all the grey rectangles beneath him, it is not simply a question of being on the 13th floor preparing to 'fly' out of the window: it means as well that the concrete jungle has been transcended. In this way the writer of the note, the person picking at the plaster, even the boy in the underground, can stake a claim to being Icaruses rather than just dead ducks.

The black, 'hopeless' area of the canvas is left vacant, whereas the area containing traces of humanity has been transformed into a brighter zone of greens, blues, browns and purples. Rickaby's imaginative and creative 'leap into the dark' seems to be an attempt to overwhelm the inert blackness with vibrant colour. In this attack on black by the use of bright colours, Rickaby echoes the Impressionists, who renounced the use of black and turned to a world of bright, complementary colours evoking a more organic, pastoral world.

Rickaby, too, is attracted to the pastoral idyll. In a previous exhibition 'Looking at a Group of Buildings in Ireland', he described, using photographs and text, a village in Ireland and showed a preference for the 'tangibility' of village life over the 'elusiveness' of city life: 'In contrast to the complexity and ungraspability of life in a centre of modern capitalism, an object such as one of these small buildings appears to me as an obvious and reassuring lump of reality.' Of course, the secure, pastoral idyll has only ever existed in the mind of the city dweller and Rickaby immediately undermines the romanticism of his own pronouncements by 'picking at the paint of the Post Office wall', thus dismantling one of the village doll's houses that a moment ago offered such stability.

The strength of *Incidents* is that his colourful intimations of a 'quiet location' rise from the rubble of the concrete jungle. Thus he does not fabricate a Disneyworld of pretty colours that are on permanent holiday from a colourless urban sprawl, but shows how the participants in both these worlds are continually engaged in the struggle for survival.

This is Tony Rickaby's third exhibition at the Pentonville Gallery, which was set up specifically to show artists concerned with radical and political issues. Early next year they will start selling radical books in addition to arts magazines and open a bar. There will also be poetry and literature readings, as well as performance-art seasons.

DANCE

Growing old

Stephanie Jordan

London Contemporary Dance Theatre
The Place

THE LONDON CONTEMPORARY Dance Theatre, now in its 21st year, deserves a salute for its successful past even if its present remains uncertain. Special tribute should be paid to Robin Howard who, enraptured by Martha Graham's visits in the 1950s and '60s, made the momentous decision to establish contemporary dance in Britain, pouring much time and personal wealth into the venture. Founding a company is one thing, but Howard set up around his a strong support system: a school, the first to teach how to make dances as well as to train professional dancers, and an arts centre, The Place.

At that time, the era of 'happenings', multi-media, the crossing of boundaries between the arts, Howard's enterprise enjoyed a major input from the then powerful art schools. There were new ideas about the structuring of artworks — non-linear, non-dramatic and collage forms — and a new politics from the overthrow or deconstruction of familiar art content. The more mature students entered the London Contemporary Dance School eager to blend recent artistic developments into this new form and, for a while at least, the school was small enough and flexible enough to allow them ample freedom. Bear in mind that there were no other training schools in contemporary dance at that time and, until the mid-'70s, the school nurtured nearly all of our contemporary/New Dance choreographers.

The company that Howard founded developed something quite different from previous '60s art-school ideology. It was led by Robert Cohan, Howard's choice, a solid adherent to the movement principles that Graham had established from the late '20s into the '40s. All this was new to Britain, but Cohan was an inspirational teacher with undeniable theatrical flair and the shrewdness to penetrate our educational system. Under him, the company quickly acquired a reputation and a following.

In fact, the company image turned out to be one with which we could be entirely comfortable. There were stars, leading dancers from the Graham Company including Coban himself, there was much theatrical razzmatazz and there were stories in the pieces. The work celebrated body power — a physicality that the climate of the '60s encouraged — yet kept it at a respectable distance, hidden within myth and rituals. In a generalised sense, we were asked to respond much as we were accustomed to respond to ballet: to the appeal of dancer glamour, of unreality, of identification with larger-than-life figures portrayed on stage.

This is not at all the aesthetic territory to which a new, independent generation of dance students belongs. The major problem for LCDC has been that, strong though its first footings were, it has never really learnt how to come to terms with this new generation. Instead of doing the necessary catching up, it has continued to feed off the past. It has invited works from Richard Alston and Siobhan Davies and one or two experimental choreographies from abroad, but these remain stylistic oddities. And now, alas, all the creative energy has gone elsewhere.

Look what we are down to now: *The Phantasmagoria*. The title derives from a scare-show that originated in Paris in the late 18th century and LCDT's version aims at panto-cum-rock musical. Part I, mostly Cohan's, is a Pandora's Box containing much cavorting in costume and mask: Perseus and The Monster and the Medusa, Frankenstein, a Nymph and Shepherd disporting themselves with a shiny pole, a fellow with four legs, another with a smouldering tuxedo, Patrick Harding-Irmer, seen first as a man stuck in a web, later spinning amid drum majorettes and American footballers. Part II is a raucous revue by Tom Jobe, owing less to fantastical theatre than Academy Award ceremonies, with jazz interludes between vaguely discernible homages to Piaf, Callas and less familiar Jobe obsessions. Challenging ideas have often been shaped from the codes of showbiz, but here, presumably posing as art, we have the blank dance equivalent of muzak. It is whimsical theatre aimed at the soul of the TV pap legions who can,

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and do, happily giggle and chat through the proceedings.

The newest company choreographer, Jonathan Lunn, provides *Hang Up*, about a relationship that has more or less collapsed. The tale of indecision and jealousy is told as a wincingly accurate telephone conversation by Anthony Minghella. The pace and complexity of the chat dominate, occasionally revealing tantalising moments of contact between speech and movement. At least Lunn is thinking about movement and the structuring of it; this puts him way ahead of the other men choreographing for LCDT.

Lunn has learnt most from Davies, whose latest work *Red Steps* is carefully wrought to play with the tensions between motion and clipped duet sculptures, loops and angles. Yet the result is drier and duller than most other Davies works, partly a choreographic problem — much of the material is insufficiently distinguished — partly a problem of performance by dancers who are powerful enough, yet slow and ponderous, often dragging the dynamics down into a monotone.

So far, the best new piece is by the American Rosalind Newman. Here are the situations, speeds and complexities of life today, snippets of urban social behaviour, gangs of boys and girls in their ritual games and rivalries, all emerging from some woman's vague recollection of some man met in her past. As the title says, *John Somebody*. Newman has a skilful way of making her situations — moping, laughing, loving — arrive unexpectedly and, while there is design, there is also urban sprawl.

The Newman injection is useful, but, without a thorough overhaul of company strategy, remains a cosmetic improvement to the present LCDT repertory. The courage of the early years is needed again. I hear that there is soon to be an 'epoch-making' announcement about the company's future. □

COMMENT

THERE ARE SOME in the **art-education world** who are feeling bouncy about things. 'Bullish' is how David Sherlock, Chair of the Conference for Higher Education in Art and Design (CHEAD), describes the immediate future.

Last month's Great Education Reform Bill alarms him not one iota. And, since the Tories' principal criteria for higher-education funding are student demand and 'national need' (in practice, the needs of industry, finance and commerce), his would seem to be a reasonable response. On the one hand, our fine-art courses have the greatest excess of demand over supply; on the other, more students from art-and-design courses move straight into 'satisfactory' employment than students of any other subject but computing.

So far, so healthy. Or is it? The overall Tory approach to education, and Kenneth Baker's GERBIL specifically, seem to others (whom Sherlock describes as Jeremiahs) to be dripping slow poison into the veins of art-and-design education.

A great many changes that have taken place in art schools over the last few years are, of course, to be applauded. Pressure to become less introverted has led to an increase in part-time and mature student provision, in placement work in the community, in communication with those industries that employ art, craft and design skills.

But focus for a moment on that last point. The interaction of industry with education is useful only when *both* parties have the power to bring new ideas to the exchange — and the GERBIL makes plain this government's intention to let industry shout education down. The bill's instructions concerning the two new funding councils for higher education, the UFC and the PCFC, make it possible for each to have, among its members, a majority of people who 'appear to him [the Secretary of State] to have had experience of, and to have shown capacity in, industrial, commercial or financial matters'. And there are similar rules concerning the governing bodies of individual educational establishments.

Already, art-and-design education is aquiver with 'efficient management', 'relevance to industry', etc. It's not by chance that the latest Rector of the Royal College of Art, Jocelyn Stevens, was plucked from a career in newspaper management, or that John McKenzie, who heads the new conglomerate of London art and design schools, the London Institute, is an erstwhile marketing executive. I'm quite prepared to believe that such men have usefully stirred things up — but, if it's true that British industry needs good design to prosper, then industry needs to listen to, not merely instruct, the visually creative.

This is true within the government's own terms of reference.

The allegedly 'disorganised' Lydia Kemeny — who's to be succeeded as head of St Martin's fashion department by 'managerial catalyst' Peter Pilgrim — helped produce such undoubted money-spinners and national-prestige-enhancers as Katherine Hamnet, Bruce Oldfield, John Galliano. And the art schools of the 1960s, including those small ones currently in danger of enforced amalgamation, didn't do so badly either. Terence Conran, Mary Quant, David Hockney, John Lennon: all these emerged from their art educations to make the government *lots of money*, both directly and indirectly.

So the government, as usual, is being myopic, or not entirely honest, or both. To continue with what must be its myopia: you cannot expect that the British will become a nation of superb designers if you signally fail to do anything at all about visual-art education in schools. The press has recently been gasping at the fact that some six million adults in this country have difficulties with basic literacy and numeracy. Well, considerably more of us than that emerge from our schooling visually illiterate — and still, at the core of Baker's core curriculum, are English, Science, Maths and Technology.

Clearly dishonest is the government's conflation of industry's needs with those of the nation. While not denying that it would be lovely to have an attractively designed environment — which should, had the government got it right, be one by-product of its plans — better industrial and product design cannot be the sole aim of art education. In an age of increased, enforced leisure, for instance, the practice of art becomes more and more possible, daily, for more and more people: as a recreation, a route to self-knowledge, a means of exploring experience, a form for group or self-expression. And, in an age where visual messages bombard us, an art education is also vital for understanding with what it is that we are being attacked — from advertising posters that are purely pictorial (some even playing art-history games) to that ever more popular political form, the photo opportunity.

Everyone's noticed that Kenneth Baker's bill has allotted to the Secretary of State for Education (Kenneth Baker) 175 new powers. The theory is that the Tories believe they can allocate them with impunity, since there's precious little chance of a Labour Secretary of State soon picking them up. Whether that analysis is right or wrong, the important point is not *which* Minister can hire or fire lecturers, close or open courses, restructure syllabi at whim — to be precise, after one month's consultation with people whom he or she has appointed and may, in any case, ignore — but that *any* government should have such absolute control of arts, and other, education.

The more establishments through which power is spread, the better for the powerless who must live with them — but Margaret Thatcher doesn't think like that and she's old enough to remember the '60s, when higher education produced such irritating, high-profile opposition. It's true that neither artists nor students have been much trouble of late, but, having gobbled up the obvious oppositions, Thatcher is still feeling hungry. So much, then, for the GERBIL as an instrument of national good. And so much for the long-term bullishness of art-and-design education.

SO much, too, for the photographic gallery at **Watershed in Bristol**. When this first media centre in the country opened in 1982, it was praised as a new kind of partnership between the arts and commerce. Though its *raison d'être* was the promotion of video, film and photography, a part of it has always been alloted to money-generating conferences.

Then, last Thursday, the balance went askew. Staff were informed that the photographic gallery was to become a conference hall, not only putting three people out of work but totally shifting the focus of the buildings away from culture towards business — well over 50 per cent of the space will now be devoted to the latter pursuit. Aggrieved punters should write to John Bedford, Chair of the Watershed Trust at 1 Canons Road, Bristol, BS1 5TX.

Harriett Gilbert

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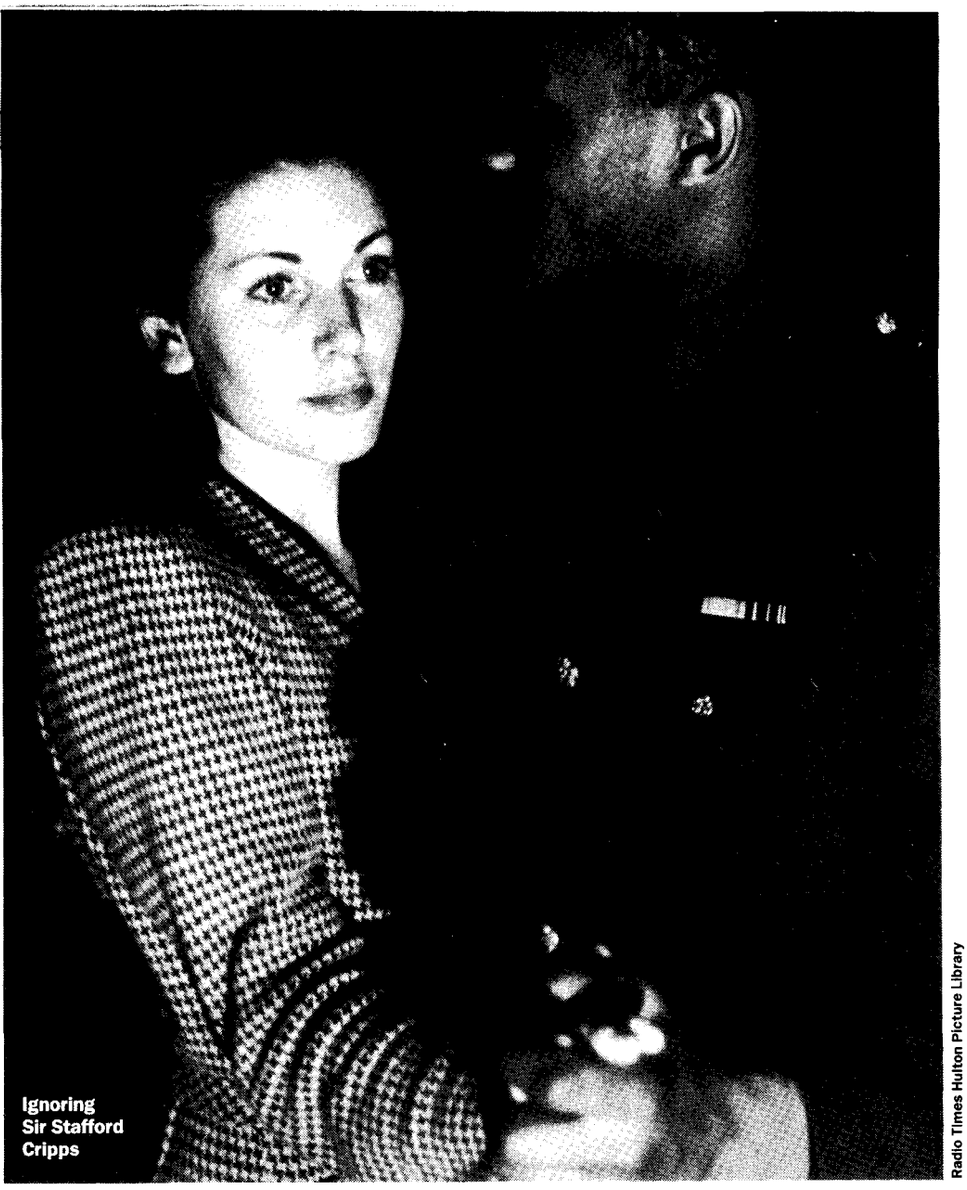
Books

GI BLUES

One more white man's war

Peter Fryer

When Jim Crow Met John Bull: Black American Soldiers in World War II Britain
GRAHAM SMITH *I.B. Tauris* £14.95



Ignoring Sir Stafford Cripps

Radio Times Hulton Picture Library

IN 1944, when I was 17 and had mastered a couple of boogie-woogie bases, I had the good fortune to meet some black GI musicians stationed near Hull. They taught me the rudiments of blues piano and let me jam with them. Graham Smith quite rightly reacts against the stereotype of 'simple rhythmic music' being 'inborn in the negro race', as *Picture Post* put it in 1943, and has therefore little to say about the Afro-American music which, now heard live for the first time, captivated so many of my generation. He does, however, mention a choir of 200 that gave concerts all over Britain, and big bands like the '923 Reveilleers' and the 'Rhythm Rockets' that, in East Anglia, 'offered enormous excitement to locals of all ages'.

Smith's book, on which he worked for more than ten years, covers every other imaginable aspect of the presence in wartime Britain of over 130,000 black GIs, and of their impact on the British government and on those British citizens who came into contact with them.

The US army in those days was a 'Jim Crow' army; it was not to be desegregated until 1951. The American military authorities imported their discriminatory practices into Britain, so that parts of the country came to resemble contemporary Mississippi. Not only were there separate living quarters for white and black troops; pubs, dance halls, Red Cross clubs, and even whole towns were out of bounds to one or other group. In East Anglia, for instance, the River Dove was the boundary. Eye and Diss were 'black' towns; Horham, four miles away, was 'white'.

The presence of a racially segregated allied army on British soil, during what was being presented as a war for freedom, caused much embarrassment to the Churchill government. Fearful of offending its American ally, it reacted with cant, hypocrisy and equivocations. At first Foreign Minister Anthony Eden wanted to stop black troops coming to Britain altogether, or at least have their numbers strictly limited. War Minister P.J. Grigg and Home Secretary Herbert Morrison, a pillar of the Labour Party, were both obsessed about sexual relations between black GIs and British women, as were some of Churchill's informants. Another Labour minister, Sir Stafford Cripps, thought that British soldiers should 'respect' the white American racist point of view, adding that 'it is undesirable that a white woman should go about *alone* in the company of a coloured American'.

The War Cabinet concluded, in the autumn of 1942, that 'it was desirable that the people of this country should avoid becoming too friendly with coloured American troops'. Soon British soldiers were being advised to be polite to their Afro-American comrades, but not to fraternise with them or offer them a drink.

The British people, in general, were much more welcoming. They tended not to believe the stories spread by white GIs: that, for instance, black people had tails and barked like dogs. The segregation insisted on by the American military authorities went against the grain, and was widely resented. One West Country farmer was reported as saying: 'I love the Americans but I don't like those white ones they've brought with them.' Pubs were said to display signs reading: 'For British people and coloured Americans only.' In Bristol, civilians encouraged black GIs to resist the military police. To be sure, working people were more in favour of the black GIs, whom they saw and sympathised with as underdogs, than were the middle and upper classes ('antipathy towards the blacks', writes Smith, 'increased in direct relation to people's status on the social scale'). And there was a certain amount of disappointment when people who had tended to idealise the black troops found out that they had human failings like everybody else.

But many young women never wavered in their attachment to those some called 'tan Yanks'; and this caused continual friction with white Americans stationed here, who harassed and beat up black compatriots seen walking with white women. It also led to an extraordinary whispering campaign, fostered by Lady Reading's Women's Voluntary Service and taken up by many local newspapers, alleging that venereal disease was prevalent among the black GIs. Such rumours had less effect than was hoped by those who spread them, for in August 1945 hundreds of girls besieged the Bristol barracks where black soldiers were getting ready to go back home, shouting: 'To hell with the US Army colour bars! We want our coloured sweethearts!'

One fear much expressed at the time was about the fate of 'brown babies'. Smith estimates that there were in fact somewhere between 700 and 1,000 of these. Many were abandoned by mothers under strong social pressure and adopted. Smith has traced and interviewed three of these people, and has dedicated his book to them.

In novels, plays and films, on television too, justice has not been done to the black GIs in Britain; they have been written out of history. Nor, as Smith makes clear, did their presence here do anything to prepare the British for the postwar black settlement. These are facts worth pondering, as is the whole of Smith's well researched, well written and shaming book. □

A second edition of Peter Fryer's Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain *has just been published by Pluto.*

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Books of the year: II

Part II of our Supersurvey of books that NS *contributors have enjoyed reading in 1987.*

Lynne Segal

If, like me, you are the dutiful daughter of generations of women who refused to learn the art of cooking — yet still hanker after 'womanly ways' — **Turning the Tables: Recipes & Reflections from Women**, compiled by Sue O'Sullivan (Sheba, £5.50) should be your Xmas read. There, amidst the widest possible variety of recipes, many of them mercifully speedy, you'll find definitions of socialism, experiences of sex, dramas of cooking, eating, giving and receiving. On the heavier side of literary consumption, I learnt most this year from Elaine Showalter's **The Female Malady** (Virago, £6.95) with its magnificent sweep through psychiatric and literary records of women and madness over the last century and a half.

Raphael Samuel

Looking for arguments against office blight and the mega-developments now threatening to engulf the East End of London, I came upon two books which I'm ashamed not to have read before. Robert Venturi's **Learning from Las Vegas** (MIT, £10.75) celebrates the principle of 'vital mess' in the city; Dennis Hardy and Colin Ward's **Arcadia for All** (Mansell, £9.95) the beauties of eclectic townscapes. They are libertarian rather than socialist texts, but better weapons against Mrs Thatcher's inner-city 'regeneration' — or the immaculate refurbishings of 'heritage' — than anything which is likely to emanate from Walworth Road.

Clive Ponting

As usual I am a long way behind in my reading of modern novels and so I have only just come across **The Shooting Party** by Isabel Colegate (Penguin, £2.25). A brilliantly written and deftly constructed account of Edwardian life, it combines wit, social comment and just enough symbolic action to provide a superb picture of a decaying society. A novel that makes reading a pleasure, but that could only be made into a film by losing all its real qualities.

Stuart Weir

I have had loads of pleasure from children's books (the Ahlbergs, John Burningham, the anarchic Babette Cole, Dahl's **The Enormous Crocodile**, and many others), from cook books (Colin Spencer and Sarah Brown's Sainsbury's series especially), crime fiction (Joan Smith's **A Masculine Ending** (Faber, £9.95), Elmore Leonard, Highsmith), but Nadine Gordimer's latest novel, **A Sport of Nature** (Cape, £10.95) gave me most pleasure. It's a picaresque novel about a political adventuress in Africa and I read it slowly and deliciously, evening after evening. Once again she is exploring the nature of political commitment with high intelligence and a tolerant humanism. I warm to her appreciation of sensual pleasures and found especially exhilarating a scene in which her heroine and her new lover—a powerful black politician—celebrate with a bottle of South African champagne; though I still make the comfortable protest in Sainsbury's.

Victoria Radin

Spattered with the writings of the Proust of modern theatre criticism, dripping psycho-sexual havoc and celebrity names, **The Life of Kenneth Tynan** (Weidenfeld, £16.95), a biography-cum-autobiography by Kathleen, his second wife and widow, takes place on several continents as a *Dynasty* of the arts scene, 1950s-1970s. Fascinating to read *inter alia* through its pose of objectivity, it gets sadder and less fragrant as the lives wear on.

Jules Lubbock

Spycatcher — for just two sentences: 'And we did have fun. For five years we bugged and burgled our way across London.' Strange, though, that Wright never discovered the nature of Blunt's 1945 German assignment for the Royal Family, about which the Queen's Private Secretary warned him not to interrogate Blunt. It was to 'repatriate' papers from the Hesse family archive concerning Edward VIII and the Nazis (*Sunday Times*, 25 Nov, 1979).

Fiona Pitt-Kethley

I came to Fay Weldon's **The Life and Loves of a She Devil** (Coronet, £2.95) after watching the enjoyable TV series. The book is infinitely subtler — packed with profound truths on the lot of women and the dishonesty of romance. Fay Weldon reverses all the old order — the heroine is powerful, the hero a wimp. Her style is riveting. Every word matters in this allegory of envy.

Andrew Lumsden

Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization (Free Association, £15) is by a professor of government studies at Cornell, Martin Bernal. Historians mostly being persons of inaction, although their subject-matter is politics, they are usually the worst of guides to the past: great on facts, naive in their 'readings'. This look at the whited sepulchre that Europe made of Classical Greece has been one of the year's joyous exceptions.

Simon Cunliffe

Whether ruminating on the origins of the *roman noir* or on the lesser known delicacies of Spanish cuisine, the world-weary, overweight Pepe Carvalho is an admirably qualified private eye. In Manuel Vazquez Montalban's novel **Southern Seas** (Pluto, £3.95) his efforts to recover the missing months of a dead businessman become something of a red herring. Carvalho's gastronomic sorties into the underbelly of contemporary Spain imbue the novel with all the flavour of an authentic paella.

Kim Newman

James Morrow's insightful black comedy **This Is the Way the World Ends** (Gollancz, £10.95) has Nostradamus explain to a 15th-century child how things are going to be after the big war of 1995, when the incarnate legions of the unborn put on trial a handful of representatives of the old world for nuclear crimes against the future. Our hero, a tombstone engraver, is duped into being the token ordinary person among the generals, politicians, scientists and strategists in the dock. It's an unfashionable type of novel, in which the characters debate Thomas Love Peacock-style and the author prods them towards his conclusions, but none the less affecting for that.

Alan Brien

A first novelist after 35 years of journalism, I now know reporting is a harder craft than inventing. Two truth-tellers this year who put themselves on the hot-spots of British street life and returned, only slightly singed, to electrify us stay-at-homes with eye-witness accounts of what is really happening out there, were Sally Belfrage, back from Belfast in **The Crack** (Deutsch, £12.95) and Dervla Murphy whose **Tales from Two Cities** (John Murray, £12.95) guided us round the racist citadels of Bradford and Birmingham, as the Handsworth riots erupted on her doorstep.

Roz Kaveney

In spite of the hype, and in spite of its self-serving amorality about the world of glitz and glitterati, Tama Janowitz's **Slaves of New York** is a witty and intelligent short-story collection, often at its best when the author is fabulating rather than satirising. In the *film noir* graphic novel **Watchmen**, Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons integrate type plotting and recurrent symbolism to make of conventional superhero stuff wonderfully paranoid nightmares.

Simon Frith

Bobbie Ann Mason's novel **In Country** (Flamingo, £3.50) is admirable for many reasons

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— as an affectionate account of small-town adolescence, an unsentimental meditation on the continuing emotional fall-out from Vietnam. But I was most moved by its luminous treatment of pop song. Mason throws a steady gaze on the ways in which we are stalked, as we go about our business, by sudden intimations of desire.

Jolyon Jenkins

As one of nature's Booker suckers, I tried **Empire of the Sun** (Granada, £2.95) by J. G. Ballard, which I read at one sitting on an aeroplane. This experience produced such an impressive sense of dislocation—it lasted several days—that I went out and brought **The Singapore Grip** (Flamingo, £3.95) by J. G. Farrell, who turned out to be somebody different. But that was good too, so now I read books by J. G. anybody.

Jeffrey Weeks

Roland Barthes once famously dissected a picture of a black French soldier saluting the flag. A similar image appears on the cover of Paul Gilroy's **There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack** (Hutchinson, £6.95), compounding the irony and bitterness of the title. The book is about the shifting and contested nature of what it is to be 'British' in the 1980s. Racist *and* anti-racist Britain are analysed with a fierce intelligence. Black Britain's expressive culture is sympathetically explored. It's my book of and for the year.

John Rentoul

If writing a book changed anything, would Rupert Murdoch (part-owner of Collins) publish it? I don't know, but **If Voting Changed Anything, They'd Abolish It** by Ken Livingstone (Collins, £12) has some good jokes, a useful reminder of the popularity of the Labour GLC and a wonderfully venomous attack on Ken's erstwhile deputy, John McDonnell, who was foolish enough to try to 'out-left' his boss. The following laconic sentence is the only reference to Ken's private life: 'Although the break-up of my seven-year marriage was relatively amicable, it was not easy to cope with and involved my moving into a bedsit.'

Martin Chalmers

Male Fantasies by Klaus Theweleit (Polity, £8.95) first appeared in German in the late '70s. It remains a pathbreaking reading of Fascist texts, but is also important in two other respects. It was the first major example of an intercourse of 'French' and 'German' theory which has hardly been registered in Britain. The style of the book — at once scholarly, passionate and literate — and its use of illustrations, is also a challenge to more conventional presentations of intellectual work. Vol 2 is due in Spring 1988.

John Spurling

Past and Present in Art and Taste (Yale, £20) is racier than it sounds. Exploring the overgrown paths of art history with characteristic zest, Francis Haskell opens the tombs of some strange ghosts and monsters: Khalil Bey, gambler, philanderer, patron of Ingres and Courbet; Giovanni Battista Sommariva, a rich but 'discredited, hated and ridiculous figure', who collected art 'to save the situation'; the picaresque and hypnotic art historian Baron d'Hancarville. It should certainly be a paperback, if not a TV series.

Michelene Wandor

It was a special privilege to read Jayne Anne Phillips' new collection of stories, **Fast Lanes** (Faber, £8.95). On the road in the 1980s is given a new meaning through a collection of disaffected youth, yearning for security and love, settling for the occasional encounter instead. Passing honesties and assured style give one renewed faith in the short story.

Naseem Khan

This year has needed a few laughs, best provided by the incomparable **Augustus Carp Esq, by Himself** (Boydell Press, £4.95). Subtitled 'The Autobiography of a Really Good Man', it is a wonderful slapstick satire on hypocrisy in the person of the insufferable Carp. More realism, but enormous humour, in Alfred Williams' delightful life story, **To Live It Is to Know It** (Yorkshire Arts Circus, £2.95), from hard youth in Jamaica to old age here.

Liz Heron

Toni Morrison's splendid, intricate novel **Beloved** is my choice; for the imaginative grace and complexity with which it gives words to the unspeakable experience of slavery and its shaping of black selfhood. Many of the themes in Morrison's earlier books — the tensions of female nurturance and sacrifice, the pull between individual and community, the role memory plays in identity — are pursued here to a remorseless culmination, as if the logic of all her writing has been in working backwards and deeper towards their sources.

Paul Allen

A certain class of rebel conspires with society to marginalise, neutralise and then burn himself out. Kathleen Tynan, sleuthing painfully through her husband's life in and out of the theatre, illuminates one such, bravely, in **Kenneth Tynan** (Weidenfeld, £16.95); Richard Ellman brings more scholarship to a rebel in a higher division for **Oscar Wilde** (Hamish Hamilton, £15). Witty and moving books on heroes that the Left can't encompass either.

Boyd Tonkin

Reviewing fiction, however good, breeds a hunger for other forms. So, in a year of fine novels, I shall choose instead Robert Hughes' history of transportation **The Fatal Shore** (Collins Harvill, £15). 1988 will see the Australian bicentennial: Hughes got his retaliation in first. The convicts' continent he describes up to 1868 is a vast Gulag strewn with the slow massacres sanctioned by the Enlightenment's greatest penal experiment. A long, deep shock — but strangely exhilarating in its pity, eloquence and anger.

Leslie Dick

The books I read this year that made novels seem not only worth reading but, amazingly, worth struggling to write, include Jane Rule's **This is Not for You** (Pandora, £4.50), which wins my nomination for best title ever, Paul Bowles' **The Sheltering Sky** (Grafton, £2.95) and Carrie Fisher's **Postcards from the Edge** (Picador, £3.50). Each is wonderfully intelligent, devastatingly funny and emotionally harrowing.

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AFTERLIFE

Bored to distraction

Duncan Campbell

Bare-Faced Messiah: The True Story of L.Ron Hubbard
RUSSELL MILLER *Michael Joseph* £12.95

'THE BODY HE HAD USED to facilitate his existence in this universe had ceased to be useful and in fact had become an impediment to the work he must now do outside its confines,' is how the death of L.Ron Hubbard was announced to his followers in 1986. You know the feeling.

But Ron did manage to pack quite a lot into the time when he was still inside that body's confines and Miller's illustrated tome is a diligent investigation into exactly what he did get up to.

To compile it, he got little encouragement from the Church of Scientology, some of whose members made it clear that they felt that perhaps Miller's own body had become a bit of an impediment.

Miller, who made his name as a *Sunday Times* feature writer at a time when that paper was in its hey-day, is clearly fascinated by wealthy American obsessives. His previous books include biographies of *Playboy*'s Hugh Hefner and the Gettys, the latter a hauntingly depressing book. So what does he make of L. Ron?

The most frequent entry in Hubbard's childhood diary in Washington were the words 'Was bored'. Years later he records in his 'Explorer's Journal' in 1960, when he acquires the Scientology HQ at Saint Hill Manor in East Grinstead: 'My own life is rather dull these days. I sort of won the Maharajah of Jaipur's luxury Sussex estate in a poker game.' So we see a sort of Ron Ennui, bored by normal pressures of life, bored by the early successes as a science fiction writer and driven on to more and more fantastical claims by the realisation that people will believe *anything*. There is a lot to dislike about him as he becomes increasingly autocratic and dismissive and paranoid: how he threw elderly women off his yacht as part of their 'overboarding' therapy, how he finked on former colleagues during the anti-Communist purges of the '50s.

There are also some cheery moments, as when he introduces the world's first 'clear'—a person in that state of grace sought by Scientology members. He tells his audience that she, Sonya Bianca, has perfect recall of every moment of her life. What did she have for breakfast on 3 October, 1942? asks someone in the audience. I recall a similar experience in the mid-70s when a new religion was launched by a part-time security worker called Leo at a church in Belsize Park. He also introduced a follower who could 'answer any question you can put to him.' I asked him to name the Scottish Cup winning team of 1956. Like Sonya, he was stumped. There's always some smart alec around and one can't really blame Ron for retreating to his maritime HQ for the last ten years of his life.

Miller writes very accessibly and his research has clearly been painstaking, but I have a couple of reservations. What he has not really managed to explain is why some perfectly decent, smart people got what they were seeking from Scientology; not all Hubbard's followers were weak, unfulfilled souls seeking an easy answer and a strong God. Some who have been connected with Scientology—John Travolta, Karen Black, Chick Corea, the Incredible String Band for instance—obviously found something of value. This is never fully explored and is one of the weaknesses of the book.

Second, I have a reservation about the way that we handle new, non-Christian religions in this country. I have no brief for Ron and his daft notions, nor for the more repulsive Sun Moon and his yet creepier followers, but some of the beliefs of new religions are no crazier than some of the beliefs of Christianity. If the Bishop of Durham dares to suggest that, er, perhaps there wasn't a virgin birth and perhaps some of the miracles were not quite what they seem, everyone goes bananas. Yet Ron and his people make fantastical claims and everyone goes bananas again. Funny old world.

I went down to Scientology's London office after reading the book and asked the two young men outside what they thought of it. They said they hadn't heard of it—despite all the court cases mounted to stop its publication—and suggested instead that I buy Ron's blockbuster, *Dianetics*. I said I'd read it and found it a bit turgid and they turned their attention to the next Tottenham Court Road pedestrian. Ron, presumably by now in a snappy new body, would have approved. □

Duncan Campbell is Assistant News Editor at the Guardian.

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CRIME

Why spy?

Nick Kimberley

AS PETER WRIGHT will tell you, a lot of people are obsessed with spies. The *Spycatcher* debacle is fascinating, not least for its encapsulation of some of spy fiction's abiding themes: fear of a secret state within the State, patriotism compromised, the erosion of class certainties in the face of a neurotic need for conspiracy. And where could you hope to find a more succinct confrontation between an old-style Tory sense of fair play, and a neo-Conservative 'devil take the hindmost' pragmatism? John Le Carré for one must be watching the whole farce with some amusement: these have long been his work's central preoccupations.

There's something peculiarly British in all this; and spy fiction too is an oddly British institution. Espionage has penetrated literature elsewhere, but no other country has produced so much of the stuff. The fact is underlined by the recent publication of four critical books on spy fiction. In different ways, and to different extents, each picks its way through a similar lineage, one dominated by British writers: Childers-Buchan-Ambler-Greene-Fleming-Deighton-Le Carré. It's notable that two of the books — Michael Denning's **Cover Stories: Narrative and Ideology in the British Spy Thriller** (Routledge, £6.95), and Tony Bennett and Janet Woollacott's **Bond and Beyond: The Political Career of a Popular Hero** (Macmillan, £20 & £6.95) — set out to work against the established tenets of Eng Lit, but end up with a canon no less fixed. That's not a fault; in fact it underlines that our 'appreciation' of the Greats is as bound by generic convention as our 'enjoyment' of the Popular.

Bond and Beyond, as its title suggests, is less an examination of the whole of spy fiction than an analysis of one central part of it. Bennett and Woollacott have no time for that dismissive school of criticism 'which is little more than a constant unmasking of dominant ideologies' in popular fiction. They suggest instead that popular culture in general succeeds because it's the place in which power relations are, not simply reflected, but worked and reworked. In these terms, Bond is uniquely productive (a Great Work, in fact), beginning as classy, ironic spoof, passing through a less knowing, less ambiguous phase and on to its filmed form, on the way touching almost every area of daily life: sex, fashion, consumerism, patriotism, xenophobia and more. As such, Bond the *spy* is secondary, and the book doesn't take much time over the history of spy fiction: when it does, it borrows from Denning's *Cover Stories*. Nor, given their pancultural approach, is there much in the way of lit crit, which sometimes leads to an overly deterministic view of the production of Bonded meaning: 'born in moments of crisis', popular heroes are a 'sounding board' — yet they *are* written by authors, who aren't quite dead.

It's a credit to *Bond and Beyond* that it comes close to negotiating a way through this dilemma. This is a highly sophisticated and challenging book that has much to say about how fictions (and not just written ones) work. A shame, then, that it's written in Cultural Studies Polytechspeak, full of *intertextuality, ideological discourses* and *always-already culturally activated objects*. This is little more than a code for the privileged ideal reader, and in that sense is as confining as any more conventional criticism.

Michael Denning's *Cover Stories* comes from a similar background, and is in fact published in a series edited by Tony Bennett. But perhaps because his subject is more narrowly literary, Denning's style is less congested with buzz-words. His approach is more or less historical, locating the birth of spy fiction between 1880 and 1920, a period of ideological crisis for British capitalism and imperialism. In this context, the spy story marks a shift from expansionism to insularity and paranoia — which in turn, after political shifts brought about in the work of Ambler and Greene, find a new expression in the international jingoism of Bond, born in an era of travel and tourism. Does this begin to read like the 'constant unmasking of ideologies' berated in *Bond and Beyond*? Perhaps, but achieved with some

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subtlety.

Denning links his unmasking to an investigation of the changes in spy fiction's readership: the genre's meaning is not irrevocably fixed, but shifts from one group of readers to another. Hence Denning moves away from denouncing spy fiction's political conservatism towards the suggestion that the form 'serves as a way of narrating individual political agency in a world that . . . seem(s) to block all action and paralyse all opposition'.

John G. Cawelti and Bruce Rosenberg bring a more conventional literariness to their *The Spy Story* (University of Chicago, £15.95). Their perspective is an American one, born of the betrayals of Vietnam, Watergate and general CIA skulduggery. They too trace the form 'from the naive to the sinister — from a story of adventure to one of treachery and betrayal'. There's a tendency to easy psychologising — 'the basic patterns of a secret love affair and an espionage operation have much in common' — which goes hand in hand with an inclination to run real life and fiction together. But their book is more detailed than Denning's, and has some interesting incidentals: a taxonomy of plots, a copious bibliography and filmography.

Anthony Masters' **Literary Agents: The Novelist as Spy** (Blackwell, £12.95) is the least substantial of these studies. Its aim is to show how various writers' spying experiences explain their fiction.

Perhaps they do, but Masters offers little proof. He fits fact and fiction together in the most unimaginative way, often making it difficult to tell whether his quotes originate in fiction, biography or conversation. His moral views on sex (which run throughout the world of spying, in life and in art) are narrowminded, his attitude to the politics of spying unquestioning. He ends with a quote from Maugham which stands as judgment on his book: 'Fact is a poor story-teller.' The most intriguing moment is one that didn't quite happen: in WWII, Ian Fleming, working in the secret service, tried to engineer a meeting between Aleister Crowley and Rudolf Hess. Now that triumvirate provides the basis for a wonderful *novel* that would say everything that Masters wants to, and more besides. □

FICTION

Carefully does it

Christina Koning

The Great Profundo
BERNARD MAC LAVERTY *Cape* £9.95

IN ONE OF THE stories in Bernard Mac Laverty's new collection the male lover of an elderly, now blind painter is assigned the somewhat dubious privilege of being the painter's 'eyes and his right hand', painting the master's abstract canvases according to his instructions and carrying out other, more menial tasks, one of which is reading aloud.

Appropriately enough, as befits his ex-patriot Irish status and his blindness, the painter's favourite writer is Samuel Beckett. His companion, however, expresses reservations about Beckett's elliptical style, which he finds 'quite, quite meaningless'. It is an opinion shared, one suspects, by Mac Laverty himself, whose work looks back not to the modernist fictions of Beckett and the later Joyce but to a parallel tradition in modern Irish writing, of which the best-known exponent is William Trevor — whose stories, in turn, look back to the realist style of Joyce's *Dubliners*.

Mac Laverty's stories, like William Trevor's and those of the great modernist himself, offer vignettes of real life, in almost all of which an ironic point is made which undermines the narrator's (and the reader's) assumptions. In one, 'End of Season', an ageing spinster considers a proposal of marriage from a man she first met nearly 30 years before, only to reject the prospect of an uncertain future for the certainties, however barren, of the life she already knows. One of the reasons she cannot marry is that she has an invalid sister to care for: 'When you live with someone day in, day out, the trivial things become the most important,' she reflects, expressing the stoicism which is common to all these stories, and the sense that little is to be expected out of life.

Even when the prospect of something more is held out, its fulfillment is denied. In 'Across the Street' the relationship between an old man and the young musician he has heard practising in the house opposite ends with the woman's suicide. Like many of the events described in these stories, it is unexplained.

Other people's lives, Mac Laverty seems to be saying, are unknown territory, their actions infinitely mysterious.

The best of these stories are those which convey this sense of the otherness of people's lives. Mac Laverty is a writer who deals in understatement in order to reveal the disturbing truth beneath the commonplace fact. In the title story, for instance, the narrative treads a fine line between the surreal and the prosaic. The initial encounter with the eponymous swordswallower is described with an attentiveness to detail which conveys both the strangeness of the character and his matter-of-fact attitude towards his bizarre calling: 'He straddled his legs, balancing himself, and put his egg-shaped head back, opening his mouth with an elaborate and painful slowness. I felt like saying: "Get on with it. Skip the palaver."'

In his novels — *Cal*, which deals with an affair between a young IRA conscript and the widow of a murdered RUC officer, and *Lamb*, which concerns the relationship between a Catholic priest and an epileptic boy — Mac Laverty's deliberately quiet, undramatic treatment serves his purpose admirably, conveying his characters' dangerous emotions with restraint and an absence of melodrama. The method which works so well in the novels can seem, in the stories, to be an avoidance of risk. Occasionally, the result is merely banal. Two of the stories, 'Death of a Parish Priest' and 'Remote' concern elderly or dying protagonists whose lives have been reduced to almost nothing: a vigil in front of the altar in a freezing church; a solitary journey from an isolated cottage to a local town. Using episodes such as these, a writer like Beckett is able to invest his fictions with a significance that is intensified by their apparent insubstantiality. By eschewing what he appears to regard as the tricks of modernism and concentrating instead on presenting the bare truth about his subject (in this case, the typically Beckettian theme of mortality), Mac Laverty ends up by exposing the slightness of his narrative. □

Degree ceremony

Connie Bensley

Other mothers shed a discreet tear
but I found it impersonal:
so much Latin, so much fancy footwork,

so many students in ritual subfusc —
and you, of course,
the only really interesting one.

Later, in the car park, we kissed goodbye,
I to drive back to London,
you to stay with friends.

But I can never get out of Oxford
and finally, turning a corner,
I found you once more, walking towards me.

The laughter was helpless and difficult to stop.
How often can you say goodbye?
I thought of Alice, falling into a pool
of her own tears, and getting lost in it.

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Irish can of worms

Kevin McNamara MP, Principal Opposition Spokesperson on Northern Ireland, House of Commons SW1

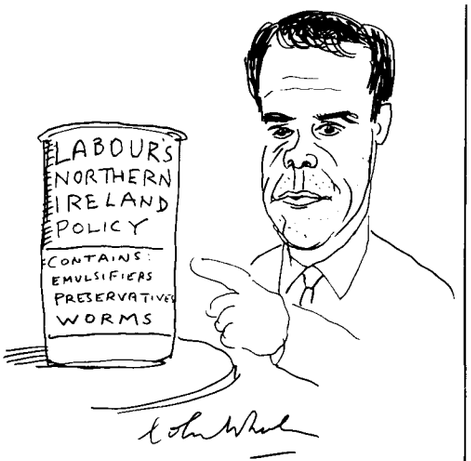
I read with a mixture of interest and despair John Lloyd's editorial on Labour's Northern Ireland policy (*NS* 20 Nov). It would have been more in keeping with John's usual high standard of journalism if he had bothered to talk to me about my attitudes instead of reporting them second-hand from hostile sources. Having failed to do so, he made a number of embarrassing mistakes.

While I do not know whether or not Northern Ireland policy will be included in the current review, John should know that the result of the most recent, extended review was published as recently as April this year. It reiterated the Party's support for the Anglo-Irish Agreement, while making it clear that we wanted to see more positive results from it. The case for unity by consent was advanced, it called for radical action to restore civil liberties and it advocated a programme of profound reforms of economic and social policies in Northern Ireland.

What the review did not do was recommend that the Party organise in Northern Ireland because there are very clear arguments against such a step. The logic of our commitment to Irish unity runs completely counter to suggestions that we should organise in Northern Ireland. If we did so, we would be in direct competition with the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP), a sister party in the Socialist International, and a party which welcomes as members those who support Irish unification and democratic socialism.

The trade unions in Northern Ireland have made it clear that any decision by the Labour Party to organise there would seriously embarrass them. The unions would come under considerable pressure and end their agnosticism on the national question and this would damage their ability to represent workers from both traditions and both sides of the border. As a party founded on the trade union movement, it would be inconceivable for us to take a course of action which might wreck the very institutions on which our Party is based.

It is not accurate to say that 70,000 Northern Ireland trade unionists 'voluntarily pay the political levy to the Labour Party'. Certainly, many trade unionists in Northern Ireland pay a political levy to their unions. The regional and national executives of those unions then decide how that money should be used. Some unions with members in Northern Ireland do pay significant sums to the Labour Party. To go beyond that statement, however, without examining the individual practices of each union is to distort the real position. Those unions which do make payments to the Labour Party are directly represented in its decision-making process through the National Executive Committee of the Party and through their votes at Party Conference. I might add, wearing my hat as Secretary of the Parliamentary Group of the Transport and General Workers' Union, that I have yet to be made aware of any vociferous demand from members of my union, the biggest cross-border union and one which



draws members from both traditions, for the Party to organise in Northern Ireland.

Finally, I must take issue with John for giving currency to a scurrilous and distorted report of a statement I am alleged to have made at a recent debate in Dublin. I have never said of Unionists 'we want to get rid of you'. What I did say (referring to the passage of Northern Ireland Orders in Council through Westminister) was 'we want to get rid of it', that is, the day-to-day responsibility for legislation which should be the responsibility of a devolved legislature in Northern Ireland. I was saying to Unionist leaders that it was time they got together with leaders of other parties to agree a devolved framework through which the people of the North could legislate for themselves. A main thrust of my contribution in the debate was a call on the audience to recognise the place of the Unionist community in Irish history and their right to a place in contemporary Irish politics.

The essence of the present Labour policy about which John Lloyd is so scathing is the search for peace and reconciliation in Ireland. As democratic socialists we cannot but recognise that for any policy to succeed it must have the support of the people. Our policies, and my efforts as Northern Ireland spokesperson, are designed to win that support.

William McDowell, London SE27

John Lloyd wrote a magnificent editorial, hard-hitting, relevant, and questioning of orthodox left thinking, but Ben Pimlott managed to do exactly the opposite and displayed an ignorance about the depth of divisions in the Ulster population which was quite frightening. No mention of long held historical hatred of the English, no mention of the detestation of the British military presence, no comprehension of the fierce hatred of Protestant high earners in the security forces, and no realisation of the intense 19th century nationalistic thinking which lies at the heart of the Irish nationalist position.

His childlike belief that co-operation with Eire (a nation crippled by debt, suffering from an historical over-dependence on agriculture, a nation which exports its young and yet still has a horrendous level of youth unemployment) was shocking, and his failure to recognise that the concessions to the 'civil rights' wing of republicanism has failed to diminish Provo support, was simply unforgivable.

I have never been more concerned that the long-term prospect for Ireland is a bloody civil war in which the Protestant people of the North, behaving like the Germans of the Weimar Republic, over-punished, misunderstood and contemptuously treated, seize control over their own destiny and bring appalling destruction on their own and others' heads and completely destroy the prospect of a united people.

Post-electoral arrangements

Hannan Rose, Editor, Radical Quarterly

Ben Pimlott still seems to be thinking in the old way of Liberals propping up Labour as a parliamentary arrangement. But as Sarah Benton says, the message (*NS* 20 November) of the conference was that this is not the place to start. If we want to be effective in 1991 or 1992, we must begin now by asserting a new agenda. The kind of area which we should be exploring combines a concern for social and economic justice not with statist or corporatist solutions but a desire to encourage participation and a new and positive concept of 'citizenship'.

Perhaps the *New Statesman*'s greatest contribution could be to provide one of the forums (note the plurality!) for the exchange of views which is necessary for the exploration of where there is common ground and what the core of a new movement could be. Without such debate and understanding, considerations such as those discussed by Ben Pimlott will appear to the voters as the manoeuvres of calculating politicians. Only if we recapture the intellectual initiative and find some common purpose will any consideration of pre- or post-electoral arrangements have any meaning.

Frightening future?

Professor Hilary Rose, University of Bradford.

Mr A. Cock (Letters 20 November) praises famous men — only one of whom wrote science fiction — and includes another whose sole claim in this context is that he was married to one of the women whose writings I do discuss (*NS* 6 November). He claims the liberal feminist Mill as a libertarian socialist; he regards Snow — among whose deathless phrases is the description of scientists as 'men with the future in their bones' — as a literary and scientific hero. If Mr Cock were to read the futurological speculations of the left scientists, he would understand the empirical accuracy of my joke about cloning lots of little Lenins, for this was precisely what left geneticists such as Muller proposed. Haldane himself was indeed rather better on this issue — but he shines out as an exception.

I hope Mr Cock finds some assurance in the knowledge that in the longer paper from which this article is drawn, there is an extensive discussion of a pioneering prowoman scientific utopia written by a male scientist and Bolshevik. Unfortunately my celebration of this genre, which I think has positive messages for both women and men, seems to have upset Mr Cock and made him feel threatened, rather than experience the writing as offering a safe place to speculate about the future. Why *does* it frighten him so much that he responds so aggressively?

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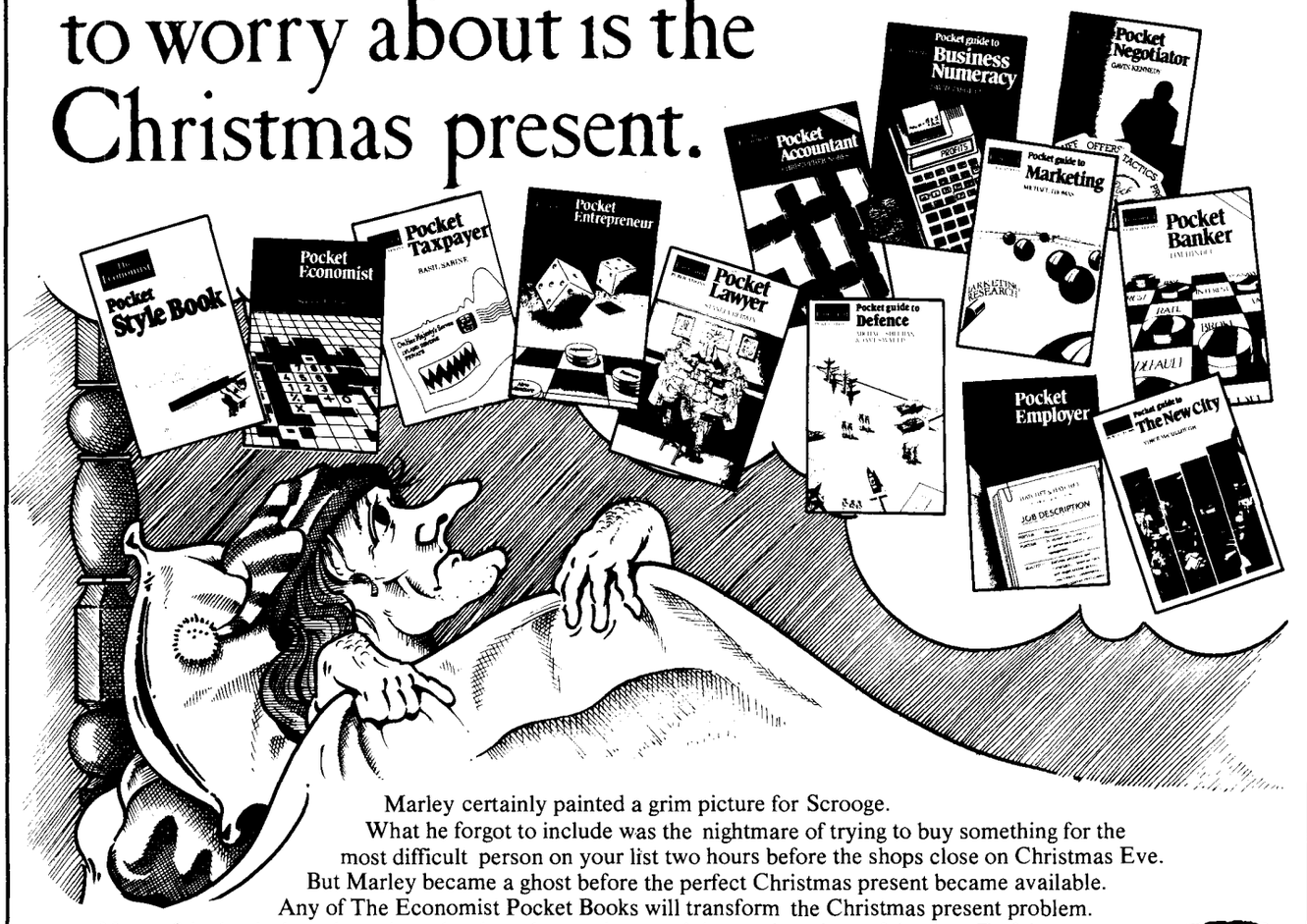

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Send an original Christmas and New Year message through the pages of the **NEW STATESMAN**. Our Christmas Triple Issue, appearing on 18 December, will contain a special festive season section where you can greet your friends, wife, husband or partner.

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FOR DETAILS CALL COLETTE O'REILLY 01-739 1645

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SAT 5 DEC

"ARMAMENTS AND THE THIRD WORLD CRISIS" Professions for World Disarmament and Development 4th Annual Conference: 9.45am, Royal Society of Medicine, 1 Wimpole Street, London W1. Programme: Chair, Lord Ennals; Report from New York UN Conference; The Trade in Arms; Economics of Disarmament; Resources and Programmes of Development; The Role of the Professions. Fee £8 (students £4) includes light lunch. Enquiries 01-458 5316.

MON 7 DEC

LONDON HISTORY WORKSHOP JOURNAL SEMINAR. Paul Stewart: "Protestant Mobilisation, The Protestant Working Class and the Ulster Volunteers 1910-1913." 7.30pm at The White Swan, 14 New Row, WC2.

SAT 12 DEC

CSE Dayschool — Quantitative Marxism, 10.30am Red Rose Club, 129 Seven Sisters Road, London N7. Discussion of Marxist analysis and data, and of orthodox applied work in Marxist terms. Contributors include Meghnad Desai, Alan Freeman, Henry Neuberger, Bob Rowthorn and Ron Smith.

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SEMINAR

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Tea from 4.30pm Seminar starts 5pm

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Classified linage (including Agenda & Billboard), and **Classified display:** noon, Friday 11 December.

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FUN

Weekend competition

No 3044 **Set by Pansy Potter**

Considering his statements on the Kings Cross Fire, what ingenious explanation would Paul Channon MP have provided for the Irish Potato Famine, the Aberfan tip disaster, the Charge of the Light Brigade, Chernobyl, etc. Max 120 words by 16 December.

No 3001 **Set by E.O. Parrott**

Parlour verses for 1988.

Report **By Rosie Hughes**

How sweet of Cynthia Hall and Gerard Benson to include the piano accompaniment. Shamefully, however, there's only Ms de M who knows how to read music and she, dear soul, has popped across to Mauritius for a couple of days. (In any case, Cynthia sweetheart, we really *couldn't* have sung your verses — let alone printed them in these pages — you forget that there's a child in the Complex.) Generally, a most excellent entry, with £12 each to the authors of the salutary verses below.

Fiona stood waiting her lover one night;
In her town house in Fulham the future looked bright.
But the hour it grew late, and her ardour had passed,
When his manly voice called her, 'I've come, love, at last.
I'm late, I admit, but it's nothing degrading,
I've only been up to some insider trading.'

She shrank from his lips, from his keyboard-cold hands,
'Gainst his take-over juggling how upright she stands!
'Go, Henry,' she said, 'right the wrong you are doing.
Applications in multiple started your ruin.
If you love me you'll part from those City-sharp swine;
No insider dealer's lips *ever* touch mine.'

D.A. PRINCE

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Underneath the lamplight's glitter
In the orange sodium glare
Stands a tramp with bulging pockets:
'Won't you buy a BP share?'
Haltingly he tells his story,
How his downfall sprang from greed.
Underwriting was his ruin —
Hear his counsel and take heed:
'Go bash metal in the Midlands,
Find yourself an honest trade.
Meanwhile, for the sake of pity,
Won't you buy some Partly Paid?'

PETE LYNOT

Oh don't go on strike, Daddy, don't go on strike,
Your work keeps us all, be it never so drear,
And Vic needs a Walkman and I need a bike,
So don't go on strike, Daddy dear.

Oh don't go on strike, the Thames Valley Police
Have full Data-bases on strikers, I hear,
And we would be hounded and given no peace,
So don't go on strike, Daddy dear.

Oh don't go on strike, it could cost you your job,
You'd not get another for many a year.
Be true to your Family. Don't march with the Mob,
And don't go on strike, Daddy dear.

GERARD BENSON

O please don't give change to my mother,
Don't further her in her disgrace.
She's abandoned both me and my brother
To vanquish invaders from space.

The beds are unmade and the milkman unpaid,
For every last five p. or ten
Is quickly conveyed to the gaming arcade
For zapping the little green men.

So if a sweet lady should enter
And start feeding coins by the ton,
Please pull out the plug to prevent her,
And tell her the earthlings have won.

NOEL PETTY

There's a modern shopping precinct
Way south of Watford Gap,
Where Wilhelmina goes to spend and spend;
She's beguiled, be-jewelled, be-minked,
But she doesn't see the trap
And counts her credit card a faithful friend.

O cashiers, scorn her custom
Though she has the magic plastic,
There's a little white-haired mother she supports;
Mina's credit sum will bust 'em —
Typists' pay's not like elastic —
Please don't let her end a bankrupt in the Courts.

M.E AULT

Oh don't go down to the football ground.
To The Den or Loftus Road,
Where crowds of skinheaded youths abound
Whose chant is a vulgar ode.

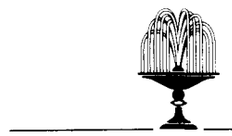
Oh stay away from the terrace mobs
With their flags and waving scarves,
For these are the wild and fighting yobs
And they don't do things by halves.

Beware of the ranting, drunken boys
Decked out in their Union Jacks,
Who proudly boast of their battle ploys
And can keenly wield an axe.

SID FIELD

Salamanca 127
'Theatre of War'

PRIZES: Copies of the *Collins Paperback English Reference Set* for the first three correct solutions opened. Entries to Salamanca 127, New Statesman, Foundation House, Perseverance Works, 38 Kingsland Road, London E2 8DQ, by first post 4 January 1988.*



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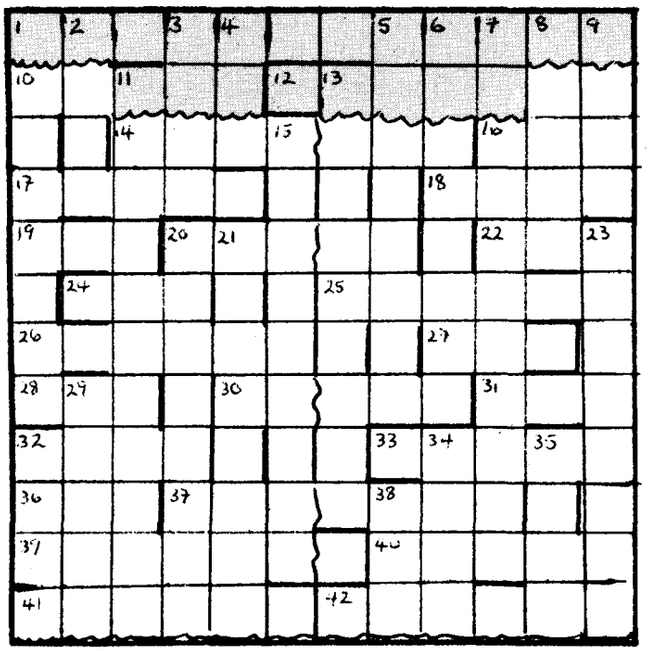


Eleven unclued answers are of a kind, and these with four others in the possible order 1D-39-15-23-20Ac-7-6-32D-13-41-11-42-29-37-21 contain an extra 'ghost' letter (contained in the secondary clueing in the latter cases) somewhere along their length, always caused by a crossing answer. Unchecked letters of the unclued eleven give 'O NO, NO, THE PANIC!', and solvers should be able to complete the shaded curtain and the name appearing in the footlights.

Name_____

Address_____

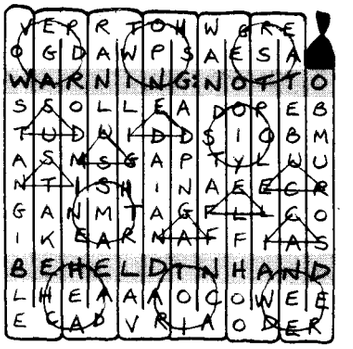
ACROSS

10 Early former production of *The Broken Heart* (5)
12 Work in theatre and run through the King's part of speech (7)
14 Sudden emergence abroad of *Hair* (rock version) (7)
16 Bream performing *Return Of The Prince* (3)
17 Have a drink? Thank you! (I'd probably love you to say this!) (5)
18 Hear a play the which is learned no longer (4)
19 A naval soldier, one of those accompanying man in play? (3)
22 Macbeth's said 'A curse on this ghost' (3)
24 What bears like and shake tree for? (3)
25 Awkward hustle for detective in play to solve (6)
26 Sailor mistook this for mermaid because there's mysterious power about it? (6)
27 Question: what is it when Queen and King go off — a quick turn? (3)
28 One's cutting points are in one direction and then another? (3)
30 Anyone for this Wells character, snide, in play (5)
31 There should be a ruff for her among the theatre effects (3)
32 Given a part with *Time*, I'm holding the ropes (4)
33 Where seated member of audience will cause obstruction to others if square and long? (5)
36 Bother with second half of comic opera (amplifier not fully on for first half!) (3)
37 Hosted variety show: when leaving a Mercedes comes round (7)
40 Get nasty looks from audience of His Majesty's? (5)

DOWN

2 Laugh at genius's theatrical dance display (4)
3 What's heard when power's shed? (4)
4 Showing some temper in the theatre (3)
5 Is this temple found in exotic localities? (8)
8 You might have a tour around this Japanese port (5)
9 This old mate runs away from brother (4)
11 They harass strange town situated between cliff and seas (11)
20 Athenian tribune holding end part of young plant (8)
21 About insectdom? That *could* be _____ society (8)
23 Stone pillar, round topped, hard black square-like construction (8)
34 Peg left a base of seed plant (4)
35 Constellation given radical turn by any pupil rising (4)
38 Supernatural creature of novel, folklore etc. (3)

Solution to Salamanca 126



Bangers: 2 bleating. 4 argues. 7 lunar. 11 arval. 122 Diana. 14 ship. 17 fast. 21 post. 22 arete. 24 sod.

Prizewinners to Salamanca 126

Alan F. Bishop & Jane Ellis
(Ilford, Essex)
Mr R. F. Naish (Worcester)
D. F. Manley (Oxford)

***Note: Salamanca will next appear in our Christmas triple issue (18/25 December/1 January), but the solution to S127 will appear with Salamanca 129 on 8 January 1988.**

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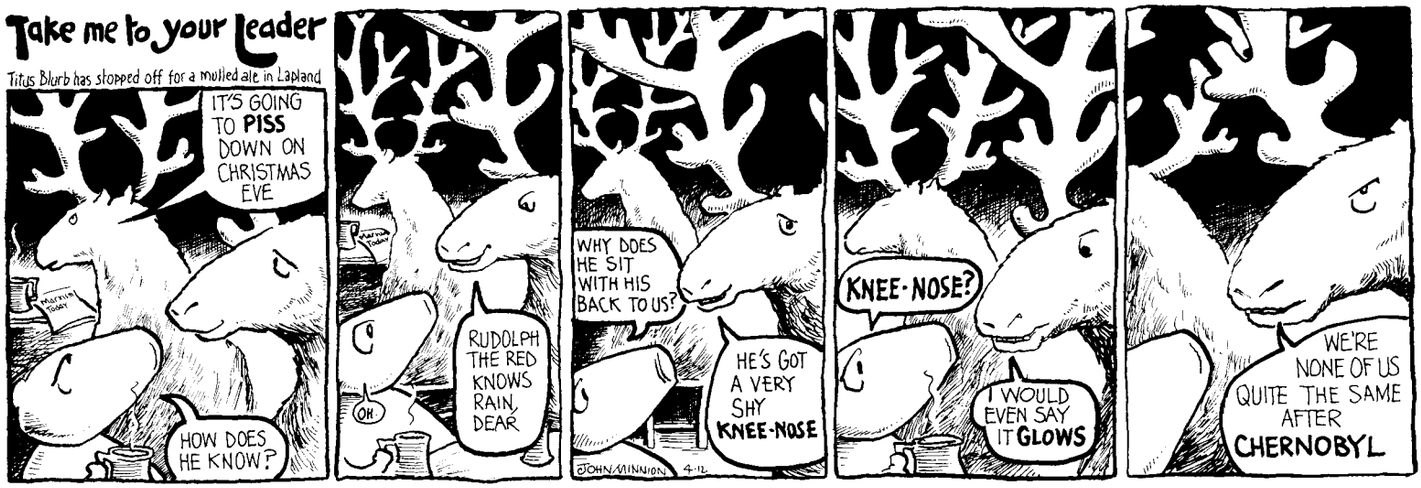

Take me to your leader
Titus Blurb has stopped off for a mulled ale in Lapland
IT'S GOING TO PISS DOWN ON CHRISTMAS EVE
HOW DOES HE KNOW?
OH
RUDOLPH THE RED KNOWS RAIN, DEAR
WHY DOES HE SIT WITH HIS BACK TO US?
HE'S GOT A VERY SHY KNEE-NOSE
JOHN MINNION 4-12
KNEE-NOSE?
I WOULD EVEN SAY IT GLOWS
WE'RE NONE OF US QUITE THE SAME AFTER CHERNOBYL

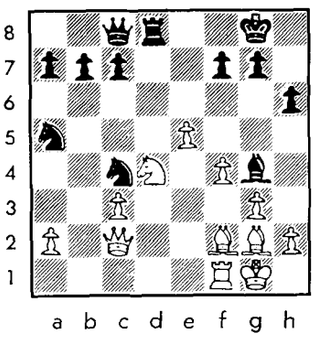
Chess

AFTER THE mid-match breather of fairly uneventful draws in games 12-14, genuine combat was resumed in Seville in the 15th game. It was Karpov who needed a decisive result: he had White, he was one game down, and, being the challenger, he cannot be satisfied with less than 12½ out of 24. However, Kasparov was sticking with the Grünfeld and he evidently thinks of it as more of a counter-attack than a defence. The champion was threatening to develop so much activity with the Black pieces that Karpov was forced into a sacrifice of the exchange. In fact, the sacrifice was quite promising and it became clear that it was the challenger who had the winning chances. Analysis may yet prove that he squandered these with his last few moves before the adjournment. Anyway, the next morning Karpov phoned the Kasparov camp with a draw offer. Naturally, he must have thought, the offer will be accepted immediately, since it is only White who could even claim to have winning prospects. The response appears to have been along the lines of: 'We'll mention it to the champion when he wakes up'. A couple of hours later, when Kasparov had woken up and said he would take the draw, Karpov was feeling so offended that he wanted to play on. But the arbiter's decision was that the offer could not be retracted.

Ideally, the story should now continue with wounded pride spurring the challenger to hit back. The truth is that Anatoly Karpov had reason to feel apprehensive about game 16. In both of their last two matches number 16 had brought Kasparov a famous victory. In itself that wouldn't worry Karpov. He is not the sort of person to believe in omens. But Kasparov is, and would be all out for a win in his 'lucky 16'. Besides, the Karpov camp were still scratching around for an effective counter to the English Opening. So one way and another it seemed that Karpov's resilience in defence would be tested to the limit:

Kasparov-Karpov, Game 16, 23 November. English Opening.
1. c4 e5 2. Nc3 Nf6 3. Nf3 Nc6 4. g3 Bb4 5. Bg2 0-0 6. 0-0 Re8 7. d3 Bxc3 8. bxc3 e4 9. Nd4 h6 10. dxe4. On many occasions Kasparov has shown that he isn't afraid of weak c-pawns if, by way of compensation, he can activate his Bishops. **Nxe4 11. Qc2 d5 12. cxd5 Qxd5 13. e3 Na5 14. f3 Nd6 15. e4 Qc5 16. Be3 Ndc4 17. Bf2 Qe7 18. Rad1 Bd7** Black's position is rather bleak. All he can do is to establish some sort of co-ordination — not easy given his shortage of space — and hope that White will mishandle the advance of his e- and f-pawns. **19. f4 Rad8 20. e5 Bg4 21. Nf5.** Kasparov plays to exchange one pair of Rooks. A good alternative was 21. Nf3, when White will either drive off the Bishop (with h2-h3) or seize the d-file after 21 . . . Qe6 22. Rxd8 Rxd8 23. Rd1. **Qe6 22. Rxd8 Rxd8 23. Nd4 Qc8.** *See diagram.* A moment of decision in the game, and maybe in the whole match. On looking at this position one's first thought is that what White wants to play is 24. f5 — it traps the Black Bishop and is a step towards opening up the Black King. The second thought is that it isn't going to work because it loses the e5 pawn. I don't know how far beyond this Kasparov went, but he does lose a pawn and in the end doesn't get enough for it. With two Bishops and central control there is really no need for White to rush things. 24 Re1 and 24. Be4 are good moves, both retaining an advantage for White. **24. f5 c5 25. Qe4 cxd4 26. Qxg4 Nxe5 27. Qe2.** If 27. Qe4 Nec4 threatens a fork on d2. **Nec6 28. cxd4 Nxd4 29. Bxd4?** Even if 24. f5 is questionable White should not be in danger of losing with 2 Bishops v 2 Knights on such an open board. Presumably Kasparov overestimates the force of his next move. **Rxd4 30. f6 Qe6!** The beginning of a passage of play in which Kasparov shows that centralisation can defend everything and then turn defence into attack. **31. Qb2 Qe3+ 32. Kh1 b6 33. fxg7 Nc4 34. Qc2 Kxg7 35. Bd5 Nd6!** 35 . . . Rxd5 36. Qxc4 is much weaker. **36. Qb2 Qe5 37. Bb3 a5 38. Qf2 f5 39. Qb2 b5 40. a3 Kg6 41. Qf2 0-1.**

Kasparov, having sealed his 41st move, resigned without resuming. But why can't White, just one pawn down, fight on? Against 41 . . . Ne4 42. Qe3, preventing 42 . . . Nd2, at least holds out for a while. But I think you will find 41 . . . Rd3 convincing enough.



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